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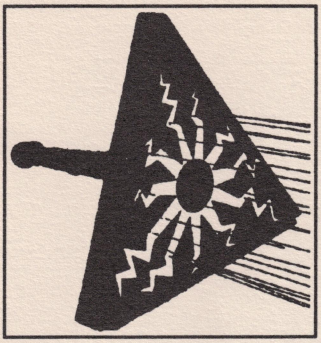

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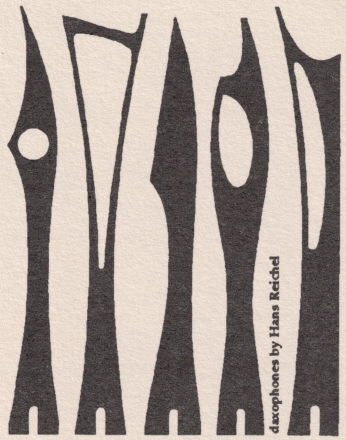


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# VOX

Welcome to Issue 22. One of the seldom stated pleasures of improv is the eminently flexible nature of its instrumental line-ups. It's hard to think of another area of musical activity where there isn't some expectation/prescription/proscription which determines what instruments are to be played in a given situation. In improv any instrument can play with any other instrument, and anybody can decide what constitutes an 'instrument' at any given time. Consequently, it's not hard to see why **instrument inventors** abound in improvised music. It's still one of the very few areas where their unique creations can be explored with sympathetic performers, and without the threat of audience ridicule or condemnation. In recognition of this visionary spirit, **Rubberneck** issues this year will devote special attention to these sonic explorers, beginning with Hal Rammel and Hugh Davies.

The second *Fiction Issue*, **Rubberneck 21**, is now available. Details of how to obtain this can be found under 'Special Issues' on the Back Issues page. Finally, **Rubberneck** proudly presents its first item of non-publishing merchandise — an **exclusive T Shirt** designed by Hans Reichel. See facing-page for details of how to snap it up. Keep in touch!

Chris Blackford/June 1996

**22**

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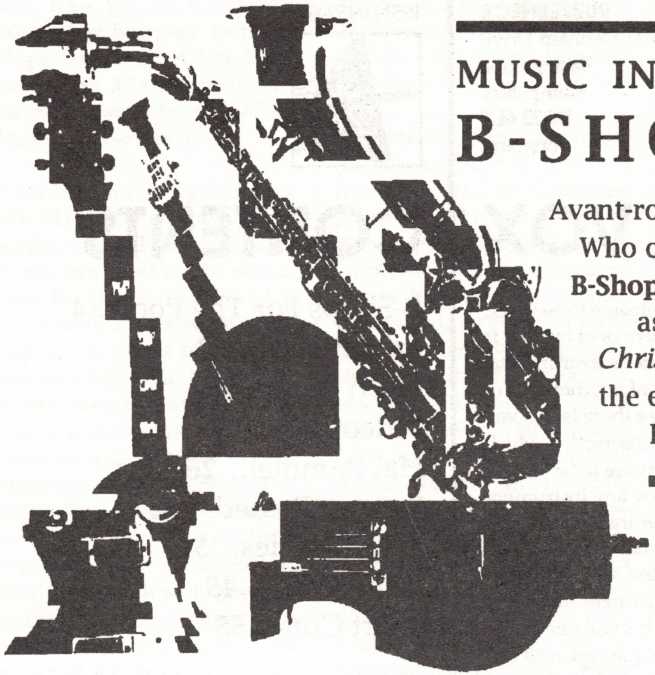
Cover Image
Triolin (1991) **Hal Rammel**

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.



# MUSIC IN THE AGE OF B-SHOPPING

Avant-rock? Free jazz? Improv? Who cares! Five albums later, **B-Shops For The Poor** remain as unclassifiable as ever. *Chris Blackford* investigates the enigma with the help of **David** and **Louise Petts**

*Approximately 1980, I was given an EP called* ***Those In Darkness*** *(The Metallic Voice, Honk 1) by The Inevitable which, of course, features an early Jon Dobie/David Petts writing partnership. There's often an interesting and ambitious convergence of styles here: 70s progressive rock, perhaps Henry Cow and King Crimson, 60s free jazz, even new wave. Some of these possible influences reappear in the subsequent B-Shops For The Poor. Could you begin by saying something about The Inevitable and how B-Shops grew out of this group. And by the way, where did the name "B-Shops For The Poor" come from?*

**David Petts (DP)** The Inevitable existed from 1979 to 1981, recording only the EP which you mention, before petering out. B-Shops began life as Jon Dobie, myself and a 4-track in 1983, and started performing live in and around London from 1986, with anything from 2 to 7 people. By 1989, we had settled on the 5-piece line-up, which has remained unchanged, except for Adrian Northover (alto/soprano saxes) replacing Steve Blake (tenor/soprano saxes) in 1991.

The group's name was taken from Brecht's/Steffin's 1934 *Threepenny Novel*. In an imaginary turn-of-the-century London, "B Shops" were cheap shops owned by MacHeath ("Mac the Knife") — cheap because they sold goods stolen by his gang.

*I can see I'll obviously have to brush up my Brecht... **The Iceberg Principle** (No Wave NW CD1, 1989) was a stylistically complex recording, especially for a debut album. There's a sax trio/quartet which is often at the heart of things, melodically and harmonically, and then there's this strong improvised element which is tightly interwoven with the themes; often improvised and notated parts happening simultaneously. Also, a sort of jazz ballad ingredient coming from the vocals. In his sleevenotes, David Ilic suggested that some of the material had been around for a while — it certainly doesn't sound faded, as it were. He also suggests a lot of possible influences which, I feel, tend to overburden the*

*group on its debut outing. What did the group feel it's influences had been at this stage; and did it feel it was further exploring any particular genre or tradition, say, improv, free jazz, or avant-rock?*

**DP** The music on **The Iceberg Principle** had been played by various line-ups over the previous few years. We also went out as a sax quartet at the time, which explains those pieces on the CD. From the outset, we wanted to perform music which combined improvisation and written structure in an interesting, rigorous way. The energy of Cecil Taylor, Evan Parker, and the compositions of Sun Ra — we wanted to play in the spirit of these, and others, without sounding anything like them.

**"From the outset, we wanted to perform music which combined improvisation and written structure in an interesting, rigorous way."**

**Louise Petts (LP)** Although we like to think that we listen widely, I think it is all too easy to state previous references that help others to define the music. I prefer to believe that, hopefully, we have eluded our favourite listening instead of imitating it, and not been limited by our listening in the creative process.

*I suppose **Visions & Blueprints** (No Wave NW CD2, 1992) represents quite a 'leap forward': a still relatively unknown London group collaborating with one of the pioneers and most influential and distinctive figures of improvised music, Peter Brötzmann. Apart from the possible 'star attraction' appeal of having Brötzmann play on what was only your second album, this collaboration might also have involved a degree of risk in that listeners might begin to compare B-Shops with Brötzmann. I feel that the front cover of the CD has a rather unfortunate imbalance: a gigantic, menacing Brötzmann with a smaller, background image of B-Shops, as if visually suggesting that he's the main attraction and the group is in some sense playing a supportive role. Happily, this is never the case in the music itself, though I do detect that most of the thematic and rhythmic statements are made by the group, whereas Brötzmann gets pretty much a free-hand throughout the project. How did this exciting collaboration come about, and what 'role', if any, did you and Peter see him performing in relation to the group?*

**DP** Jon gave Peter a copy of our first CD at the *Outside In* festival at Crawley, where we were both performing, and asked him if he'd like to play on our next CD. A month later, he 'phoned up and said "Yes". In the studio, we suggested to Peter where we would like him to solo, either through whole pieces, in certain parts of songs, or in improvised sections, and he did just that — from the outset, he seemed entirely attuned to the music.

**LP** There was a point during our recording with Peter where I was reminded of the novel *The Disenchanted* (also the title of a B-Shops track on **The Iceberg Principle**) by Budd Schulberg, in which Shep's illusions are gradually broken down upon meeting and coming to know a lifelong idol of his in Manley Halliday (himself a writer). The ethereal qualities that Shep had originally pinned on Halliday gradually became less and less until he observed a person, not unlike himself, who had ordinarily worked at what he only knew best. In fact, in our particular case, Peter preferred to endorse the view that we considered each other with equal respect.

***Plague The Inventor** (No Wave NW CD3, 1993) seems to foreground the group's interest in experimental song structure, though with room for instrumental breaks and improvisation. Could you talk about how you organise these different aspects of B-Shops' music so that they fit together into a coherent whole. For instance, you don't appear to be interested in working to a clearly identifiable verse/refrain structure.*

**DP** We felt we were not using Louise's voice enough so I started writing vocal lines which were intended to be incorporated into the music as an aid, not a hindrance, to the improvisation.

peter brotzmann sacred scrape rastascan : anthony braxton 3 compositio ns of new jazz delmark : robert black state of the bass oodiscs : bergman/ mitchell first meeting knitting factory : bley/parker/phillips time will tell e cm : derek & the ruins sairoso tzadick : lisle ellis elevations victo : frith/luss ier nous autres victo : hideki/mori/frith death ambient tzadick : coxhill/fis her slow music voiceprint : alvin curran animal behavior tzadick : coxhill/la cy/parker three blokes fmp : bley/gilmore/motian/peacock turning point i ai : lindsay cooper music for other occasions no mans : crispell/brotzmann drake hyperion music & arts : john zorn masada series diw : crispell/berne i nference music & arts : kaoru abe solo's psf : howard riley flight fmr : cecil taylor iwontunwonsi soundhills : lacy/aebi/rzewski packet new albion : bro wn/cage/wolff/feldman new york school3 hat art : keiji haino 21st centur y hardy guide y man psf : zorn/bailey/parker harras avant : william parker in order to survive black saint : mark dresser force green soul note : berg man/drake reflections on ornette coleman soul note : crispell/guy/hemmi ngway cascades music & arts : xenakis pleiades musique d'abord : joey bar on crackshot avant : john law pentecost fmr : stockhausen aus den sieben tagan musique d'abord : braxton/reichman leipzig '93 music & arts : steve beresford signals for tea avant : bergman/parker the fire tale soul note : buckethead buckethead land avant : robert dicks tambastics music & arts bill dixon vade mecum soul note : lacy/rudd school days hat hut : murphy/s pearman/parker suite of winds black saint : altered states with yoshihide lithuania and estonia live trigram : anderson/mccall vintage duets okka dis k : bauer/nozati/van hove organo pleno fmp : brotzmann/laswell low life c elluliod : berlin contemporary jazz orchestra the morlocks fmp : bark! celib acy srutti box : bailey/braxton moment precieux victo : brotzmann/hopkin s/ali songlines fmp : albert ayler new york eye and ear control esp : myles boisen guitar speak rastascan : bailey/bendian banter okka disk : albert a yler bells esp : brotzmann/drake dried rat dog okka disk : sten sandell mus ic from a water hole alice : jon rose eine violine fur valentine no wave : joh n zorn first recordings 1973 tzadick : richard teitelbaum golem tzadick : m arcus stockhausen possible worlds cmp : splatter trio jump or die music & arts : john zorn locus solus tzadick : musician the journey cuneiform : moss king/yoshihide all at once at any time victo : new klemer trio melt zonk re wire tzadick : misha mengelberg trio who's bridge avant : evan parker con ic sections ah um : henry kaiser lemon fish tweezer cuneiform : peter kow ald duos fmp : evan parker process and reality fmp : william hooker shamb alla knitting factory : parker/prati hall of mirrors mm&t : luc houtkamp th e songlines x-or : hajime/eye nani nani tzadick : charles gayle touchin' on trane fmp : ground zero null and void tzadick : mats gustafsson parrot fish eye okka disk : globe unity special '75 rumbling fmp : jim o'rourke terminal pharmacy tzadick : lokomotive konkret a voice still heard alice.....finish

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Jon Dobie: guitar, alto sax, computing

Louise Petts: vocals, alto sax

David Petts: tenor sax, computing

**LP** Within the vocal numbers, the vocal line does not necessarily sit alone on top of the bass and percussion lines as in conventional song patterns, and because of its integration with other written lines I do not write with the usual song format — ie, verse/refrain — in mind. I actually find that in writing lyrics in this way, I am allowed to write in a much more independent style which allows for the realisation of personal ideas in a much more flowing, yet concise manner. Consequently, this tends to give an often strange feel to the overall composition, seemingly unnatural to those used to normal song structures.

*I think it's fair to say that* ***The Wild Goose Chase*** *(No Wave NW CD5, 1994) and your latest album* ***A Passionate Journey*** *(No Wave NW CD6, 1995) could be described as concept-pieces — I hesitate to use the term 'concept album' because of its negative connotations — most obviously in the sense that the song lyrics have been inspired by literary and visual narratives; in the case of the former, it's a 1937 novel by Rex Warner, whereas the latter draws on two books of woodcut images (*A Passionate Journey *and* The City*) by the Beligian artist, Frans Masereel. What attracted you to these texts in the first place and, more generally, how do you work with and manipulate visual reference-points within the lyrics of your songs. Since you're the group's lyricist, I'll direct this question to you, Louise.*

**LP** Originally, I had begun to use the visual image in writing fiction — experimenting with the linking of singular graphic ideas in order to create a virtually unknown whole; ie, distorted or unrecognisable, possible forms of convention, and in so doing, removing the viewer's/reader's ability to judge in a moral/historical sense the information/fiction before them. This was made possible by raising the profile of the most minute of things in everyday life in terms of personal and social acts, objects as ideas and the arbitrariness of action and thought within the context of time. I discovered that by selecting images at random, being forced away from the usual tidying systems of thought, the desire to make 'half a whole' as opposed to 'tying up' ideas on personality and genetic notions, and ideas on events within given slabs of time, this approach seemed to me to be more truthful, more interesting and illuminating.

To include these ideas within a lyrical framework seemed to be a logical next step — using the freedom of ideas but with the discipline that song form demanded.

In both *A Passionate Journey* and *The City*, the pictures were very clearly connected, creating, in

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the process, the 'whole' of an idea. By extracting certain pictures from that whole and taking them out of context, I was curious to note that, singularly, they meant very little to me; but that by resigning them to being arbitrary images, devoid of the details of comfort one expects to find in a conventional setting, they became interesting for the simplicity they at once showed in their form.

The limitations on their meanings that I had originally placed, as a viewer with the normal expectations, had disappeared leaving a whole new set of signs and symbols to decode. Within these changed parameters, the 'object' had lost its original relativity in terms of hierarchical importance and had, in fact, gained in terms of equality; that, behind the very smallest thing seemed to be hidden a much larger theme or motive, and it is this that I feel obliged to explore.

**The Wild Goose Chase** by Rex Warner I chose for its imagery; it was so full of pictorial ideas that it seemed perfect to use, as a transitory stage before using the unadulterated image in lyric writing.

*So how do the lyrics, and your singing, become integrated with the instrumental ideas; how do you see these different elements interacting?*

**LP** In vocal compositions, Dave has usually written the basic ideas onto computer beforehand which I then get to hear before I choose to set lyrics to them. At this stage, I have no specific idea as to lyrical content, but work from the various tensions and mood-settings the numbers create. So, at the outset, I am influenced to write according to what his work provides — again, in terms of vague images or feelings. As he tends to write in batches, a whole 'family' or set of numbers usually conveys a general underlying scheme in which I find a natural focus when applying lyrics, also within a thematic context. In the 'live' situation, Jon (guitar) and John (bass) tend to improvise around and off the notes, inflections and words that the voice makes, helping to embellish further the mood of the entire song, so that the song's route from beginning to end has accomplished a 'response upon response' effect, firmly cementing both the original idea with each individual voice uttered and the creative unity within the group.

***A Passionate Journey** is, in fact, a live album — from Austria, Switzerland and Hungary, not Britain. Which brings me to the next question; which is, why you haven't performed more often in Britain. For a group*

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*that's made five albums, it seems odd that you're still virtually strangers over here. Are promoters and audiences in other parts of Europe more receptive to what you're doing?*

**DP** There are simply more places to play in mainland Europe, so that's where we play. Different countries at different times seem more interested in our type of music. Tax changes in Germany, due to re-unification, have affected the subsidies to the arts adversely, and interest in former Eastern bloc countries is quickly being stifled by the heavy hand of American sponsorship of music venues. At the moment we are finding Italy very responsive to our music.

*Finally, B-Shops seems to be a well-established unit, keeping up a perceptible momentum of regular touring and recording, the latter on your own No Wave label. But you're working in an area, experimental music, that most members of the media and the general public are simply unaware of, or indifferent to; how do you measure a sense of the group's 'progress' or even 'success', when the circumstances are this difficult.*

**DP** When you start out, you don't intentionally want to work in one specific area — you tend to get forced into it by the outside world's response to your music. But it soon becomes evident where your music is being placed by others in the practical sense, and you deal with it accordingly. Progress? Success? To us, they mean a continual development of the music. Actually, we've just finished a tour on which we recorded material for our next CD, **Signals Through Flames**. This time we recorded onto ADAT (8-track digital) so that we could retain the live energy of **A Passionate Journey** without sacrificing any of the individual components of the music.

**LP** There is a strange but beneficial tension between the position of having to work in a seemingly cultural void, and yet being able to work without any form of external manipulation because of that position — it allows independent development to take place. **R**

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## Magazines...

**Audion** #33, (October 1995) includes Krautrockers Agitation Free and Hoelderlin, Chris Cutler, Shapeshifter, Fushitsusha; #34, (February 1996) includes Manuel Göttsching, François Bayle, Nik Tyndall. £2.00 from *Audion, P.O. Box 225, Leicester LE2 0JN, England.*

**Improjazz** (#22, February 1996) Interviews with French soprano sax 'magician' Michel Doneda and acclaimed US bassist William Parker; plus, live and CD reviews, news. (in French) *Improjazz, c/o Patrick Gentet, 22 La Vallée Mismy, 44260 Savenay, France.*

**Musiche** (#17, Primavera 1996) Back after a year's absence, has interviews with Robert Wyatt, Derek Bailey, Shelley Hirsch and Paul Lovens; articles and reviews. (in Italian) *Musiche, via della Canonica 38, 19121 La Spezia, Italy.*

**Musicworks** #64 (Spring 1996) Includes James Tenney, Paul Dolden, Anarchy, Economy and Music part 3, Adrian Ivakhiv, Malcolm Goldstein, Stan Brakhage; plus, live and CD reviews. *Musicworks, 179 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5V 1V3.*

**Noisegate** is a new quarterly magazine "dedicated to the exploration and exposure of the innovative use of sound as a functional and creative medium." #1 (October 1995) includes Mick Beck, Johnny White, David Mitchell, Scott Hawkins; #2 (February 1996) includes scanners, free improv on Internet, Paul Burwell, Dual, Hz, John Jasnoch; #3 (May 1996) includes Ron Geesin, Pete Morris, Paddy Collins, Tim Baker, Sikorsky. An auspicious start! £2.00 from *Noisegate, c/o 20 Wake Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield S7 1HG, England.*

**Progress Report** (#3, 1995) Theme for this issue is "Female". Includes long and informative interview with Cosey Fanni Tutti; plus, Carolee Schneemann, Jarboe, Annie Sprinkle, Het Apollohuis, and CD reviews. £2.00 from *Progress Report, c/o Work in Progress, BCM WIP, London, WC1N 3XX, England.*

**Resonance** (Vol. 4 No. 1) Interviews with Marshall Allen, Alvin Lucier and Moondog; Chris Cutler on Plunderphonics; Van Dyke Parks, Stock, Hausen & Walkman, reviews. £3.00 from *Resonance, LMC, 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3BP, England.*

**Revue & Corrigée** (#27, March 1996) Includes interviews with Tony Conrad, Ulan Bator, Jean-Marc Montera, Setsuko Chiba, Peter Stubley, and label Ambiances Magnétiques; news and reviews. (in French) *Revue & Corrigée, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France.*

**NB** *Please remember that this magazine listings section is run on a reciprocal basis. If you mention* ***Rubberneck*** *in your latest issue,* ***Rubberneck*** *will mention you. Please send us a copy if you do!*

## Books...

**The Tapestry Of Delights: The Comprehensive Guide To British Music Of The Beat, R&B, Psychedelic And Progressive Eras 1963 - 1976**
Vernon Joynson
*Borderline Productions*
*(£27.50 PBK)*

**The Tapestry Of Delights** is a revelation. One of its principal purposes: "To bring to your attention many artists who didn't attract the publicity and acclaim they deserved first time around." Indeed, as Vernon Joynson rightly claims, many of these artists have never before appeared in an encyclopedia. From Bent Frame ("A very obscure group...") to David Bowie; from Two's Company ("A forgotten pop duo.") to Traffic; virtually every Tom, Dick & Harriet who stood in front of a microphone from 63 - 76, and then put out a piece of vinyl to celebrate the fact, are in here, regardless of alleged 'merit'. The hilarious tale of talentless, flower-power popsters, John's Children, their entrepreneurial producer and the ill-fated **Orgasm** album ("which still sounds like one of the worst albums ever recorded") is the stuff of which spoof documentaries are woven; they even command more space in the Guide than Rod Stewart!

Yes, this is a book as much concerned with the sometimes shitty underdog as the strutting superstar — their discographies and their ever-changing personnel logged in loving detail.

## NEW (AND RECENTISH) MUSIC FROM BRUCE'S FINGERS

*"assiduously documenting some superb music" THE PENGUIN GUIDE TO JAZZ*
*"a new release from Bruce's Fingers is always a cause for celebration,,,,,some of the finest new music from Britain," CADENCE*

DESCENSION - Live, March 1995 [Shock SX029 CD; CD £11.00] Charles Wharf; soprano & alto sax, bass clarinet/Stefan Jaworzyn; guitar/Simon H. Fell; double bass/Tony Irving; drums, 1995 (79 mins.) Marvellously disgusting live recordings by a quartet who pull no punches. Majestic music performed in ridiculous venues; not for 'sensitive' types. Also frightens 'young people'. *"A glorious cascade of music that proves it is precisely the pursuit of pure energy and dissonant thrill that can make something vital out of improvisation,,,,,aural crucifixion with so many thorn-in-flesh beauties you just have to keep playing it,"*
*Ben Watson THE WIRE*

VARIOUS ARTISTS - Network Volume Two [Discus 5CD; CD £11.00] Martin Archer's second compilation of 90 second segments drawn from every conceivable walk of musical life. Worth having for; Howard Ingram - De-commissioned; Simon H. Fell - 55 Double Bass Players Go Apeshit; Simon Kingsley - Pause And Effect. Plus recommended music by Yasuhiro Ohtani, John Jasnoch, Ambassador, John Russell, The Impossible, Tom & Graham, Dave Pullin & 7 Hz, 1995 (79 mins.)

**BADLAND - Badland [BF 14: CD £11.00]** Simon Rose; soprano sax, alto sax/Simon H. Fell; double bass/Mark Sanders; drums, 1995 (54 mins.) Another in the great Bruce's Fingers tradition of sax/bass/drums trios. No-nonsense newcomer Rose blows hot & cool against the textural eccentricities and rhythmic bite of the Fell/Sanders conglomerate.

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BRUCE'S FINGERS, 24 CHAUNTRY ROAD, HAVERHILL CB9 8BE, U.K.

Haverson Apricot, Humpy Bong, and the deliriously surreal Crocheted Doughnut Ring — forgotten names to conjure with. At the tapestry's edge you'll even find the avant-garde likes of AMM, SME, Keith Tippett Group and Howard Riley, who all recorded for major labels early in their careers.

The lucid commentary by Vernon Joynson and his team of collaborators is usually shrewd and fair-minded, though I strongly disagree with their negative conclusions on Ginger Baker's two Airforce albums (about time they were reissued on CD!) and Jethro Tull's **Thick As A Brick** and **A Passion Play**. It's also largely untainted by 90s' cynicism and jocularity and, happily, free from nostalgic yearning; instead, preferring to stimulate interest, especially in the little-known, by considering their efforts — however naive or pompous they may now seem — within the context of the *zeitgeist* that engendered them.

That profusion of styles (r'n'b, folk, psychedelic, hard rock, jazz, ethnic, classical, improv) which converged within the still vilified late 60s to mid-70s progressive rock genre, is particularly appealing; here, the archivist's torchbeam reveals a scattering of neglected, innovative British groups (including Comus, Gryphon, High Tide, Third Ear Band) who were just as interesting as the Krautrockers who are currently enjoying a huge critical revival (much of it opportunistic and market orientated — the true diehards know who *they* are!). But the British progsters' time will come again...

This book also functions as a collectors' guide, providing information on the approximate price, availability (including CD reissues) and merit of rare albums and singles. And there's plenty of photographs of record covers to bring back memories of groovier times. If the price tag seems rather hefty for a paperback encyclopedia, consider the detail and astonishing scope of the research contained therein — a great deal of which you won't find anywhere else. **The Tapestry Of Delights** is, quite simply, the most compelling encyclopedia around. Its cross-referencing system will have you journeying avidly through the labyrinthine highways and byways of yesteryear. *(Borderline Productions, P.O. Box 93, Telford TF1 1UE, England)*

**Simply Not Cricket:**
**Catalogue du Jazz Britannique 1964 - 1994**
Philippe Renaud

This is the updated (from 1985) and expanded second edition of Renaud's discographical catalogue. Beware: the co-editor of French magazine *Improjazz* has an outrageously liberal notion of what constitutes 'Jazz Britannique'. For instance, on page 48 alongside straight-ahead stalwart John Dankworth, you'll find Chris Cutler and Lutz Glandien (other associated Europeans and Americans are listed); Gavin Bryars' **Sinking Of The Titantic**, AMM, Adam Bohman, Echo City, Henry Cow, The (EC) Nudes, (etc, etc) are also included. But are they 'jazz'? Well, of course not! Philippe Renaud simply adores all kinds of British experimental musics, so can't resist shoe-horning all his loves into one book, regardless of their applicability to the central jazz premise. Unfortunately, in his eagerness to lump together a host of innovative, yet still marginalised non-jazz musicians, he unwittingly does them a considerable disservice by downplaying their prime achievement — which is to have created startingly original musics that continue to defy easy classification. A suitable retitling of the book to allow for this diversity would help to rectify matters.

Nevertheless, if you can overlook this fundamental philosophical problem, you'll still find Renaud's catalogue brimming with vital discographical information that you're unlikely to find anywhere else, and supplemented by personnel and instrumental details (Renaud does not offer descriptive and/or evaluative comments on any of the works listed, so this is one for the initiated). This well produced tome also includes numerous photos of vintage album covers. It's a huge pity that there still isn't an encyclopedia to provide the biographical background to the more obscure talents mentioned in this catalogue. (in English and French)(contact: *Philippe Renaud, 14 Allée des Myosotis, 41000 Blois, France*) **R**

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**Free-Forum** is compiled and reviewed by **Chris Blackford**

# high energy low overheads

## Elton Dean at 50

**John Eyles** talks to the great British saxophonist about the business of making free music

photo: Andrew Putler

Last autumn, Elton Dean reached the landmark age of 50, celebrating with a series of performances at the Vortex in Stoke Newington, London. This seemed a good time to interview the alto saxophonist and saxelloist for **Rubberneck**, to catch up on his current projects, and to briefly look back; especially since a cover sticker on one of his latest CD releases (**Silent Knowledge** on US label Cuneiform) refers to him as "legendary British saxist Elton Dean".

One of my most pleasurable listening experiences of the past year came on the last Sunday in February. Sunday is Jazz Rumours night at the Vortex, when the club showcases experimental and improvised music. Throughout February it featured Slam recording artists, and this night was the culmination of the mini-festival. The highlights of the evening were two sets by The British Saxophone Quartet (Elton Dean, Paul Dunmall, George Haslam, Simon Picard, joined by Lol Coxhill for the second set). Totally improvised, each set was remarkable for the way in which the sounds of the four (or five) horns merged together and then separated again. At times, one player would be dominant, but it was the overall ensemble performance that impressed, not any individual. The players responded to each other's ideas with such sympathy and subtlety that the total sound developed without it being obvious where each new strand had come from. Long, varied, melodic improvisations evolved naturally with each member contributing to the process. Given the drive, energy and invention of this performance, I was keen to hear the latest BSQ CD, **Early October**, recently released on Slam.

It confirms that the quartet frequently produces such sublime sounds.

Shortly after that gig I met Elton Dean for the first of two conversations. Initially, we met in a local pub, where he goes to watch football on Sky. Prior to the interview I had heard that Elton liked a drink, but significantly, he only drank Coke.

"I had a lifestyle change about 18 months ago. I had to give up drinking. I was a heavy drinker, and I had to stop immediately because my liver packed up. Now I'm putting a lot more time into thinking and doing things. I'm not wasting it down the pub. It was a bit difficult at first, psychologically and physically. I've always played a little bit drunk, and when I didn't have that I was actually getting nervous. When playing I could feel myself very aware of everything. I think it has made my playing more concise. I don't play as long but it is more focused. I feel young, reborn, quite energetic. But I'm old enough to be quite philosophical about things."

For a number of years now, Elton has been the driving force behind Jazz Rumours. Originally happening every Sunday evening in the upstairs room at a local pub (called Rumours), it has latterly migrated to the Vortex. It provides a valuable weekly showcase for improvised music. Somewhat surprisingly, it is also the only venue in the country where Elton plays regularly. He appears there about once a month. In March, he was there with the quartet that he co-leads with pianist Howard Riley, playing a mix of originals and standards. Much more "in the tradition" than the BSQ, this shows that Dean is as comfortable in a jazz setting as he is with free improvisation. In April, he played in a quartet with trumpeter Claude Deppa. In May, he was back with In Cahoots, a quintet with Phil Miller on guitar and Jim Dvorak on trumpet. When I spoke to him he had quite a bit to say about the lack of opportunities to perform in this country and gave an insight into the struggles of many musicians.

"In London, if I look at my books for the past year, I play about once a month, when I put myself on at the club. There is very little else over here. The only little tours are got together with Arts Council assistance. They bolster the wages to something reasonable. And you can get a travelling grant from Jazz Services. Otherwise you would not make any money. The weird thing is that this kind of set-up is not doing a lot of good, although it does provide people with work. It also gives them the opportunity to go out at a very cheap price. Promoters get used to these cheap prices, so when you ask for a realistic price they will take someone they can get for £200. That is the figure which, I think, is quoted by the Arts Council as the minimum price. But people go for the minimum.

**"It has never been a goal to make money. I've never really worried about it. In retrospect, I've sailed through, kept my overheads very, very low and thought about music all the time."**

"Recently I have been talking to Anthony Wood [founder of *The Wire*] who is helping me to get some work. There is no agent who is interested enough in improvised music to book it regularly. It needs someone who is prepared to work at it for a couple of years and willing to build it up, but not make any money initially. Part of the problem lies with festivals. To put a tour together, and make it financially viable, it needs to include a couple of festivals. However, festivals are either interested in big name American players or in local talent, not in someone like me. Even someone like Anthony, who is experienced, finds it very difficult to get bookings. There would seem to be more musicians, less work and less money.

"I work a bit in France with Pip Pyle and Paul Rogers, in Pip's group. There are one or two other things I pick up in Paris. For instance, there is a project which Jim (Dvorak) and I want to get together in Paris with Bobby Few. And then there's the Anglo-Italian Quartet. We do about a tour a year in the North of Italy. They run a little jazz collective in Turin, and are the rhythm section for about three or four groups. Harry Beckett and I have been invited over for the last six or seven years. We did one tour here about five years ago,

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and that is the only time they have been over here... but that was quite a well-kept secret!"

Despite the paucity of gigs, Elton will have plenty of recordings released this year, both new releases and reissues.

"It is easier these days to find places to make a record with DAT machines. Everyone seems to know the process of putting their own records out and eventually breaking even. There is a mass of product out, probably too much product. It used to be important not to do that. It would be important to space your recordings out, once every six months or a year. It doesn't seem to matter now. You are doing well to sell a thousand reasonably quickly in a year.

photo: Andrew Putler

"There is a company called One Way Records that releases old vinyl stuff on CD which has taken some old unreleased Soft Machine stuff, some I did with Keith Tippett and some with Joe Gallivan, and sold 2000 in about a month. There seems to be an interest in the States in the mythical Canterbury scene and its offshoots. [That is a whole other story. Suffice it to say that Elton, though Nottingham born, is linked into the Canterbury scene via his time with Soft Machine. He also links in via Pip Pyle of Gong, who plays drums with the Dean/Riley quartet and In Cahoots. Pete Frame is doubtless aware of this fact!] There is also an interest in Ogun stuff such as Ninesense and Brotherhood Of Breath. It is a way of making money."

Elton repeatedly returns to the financial aspects of being a musician. Were it not for his illustrious past he would probably be in financial trouble. Recent legal work has ensured that royalties from Soft Machine sales now go to the band members rather than to past managers, so he does see some money from that era.

"It has never been a goal to make money. I've never really worried about it. In retrospect, I've sailed through, kept my overheads very, very low and thought about music all the time. I have a very nice life, shared between Paris and London. I enjoy the music. I have to duck and dive for money, but it normally sorts itself out. The secret is low overheads. Not to get caught up in mortgages and alimony."

It should already be obvious that Elton plays in a large number of different settings, some regularly, some irregularly. There's Phil Miller's In Cahoots, Pip Pyle's L'Equip Out, Anglo-Italian Quartet, a quartet with John Etheridge, Liam Genocky and Fred Baker; these are all once a year bands; his longstanding quartet with Howard Riley is a regular group. And, not forgetting the occasional gig with the all-star Dedication Orchestra.

Despite his French and Italian connections, Elton seems a very English player. He has played in the past with Americans such as Carla Bley, Charlie Mariano, Dennis Gonzalez, and has had a long association with Joe Gallivan, dating back to 1970. Nonetheless, in contrast to some of his

contemporaries, such as Evan Parker and Lol Coxhill, he plays a lot less with European players.

"Evan and Lol, in particular, are solo performers and are more mobile. They are booked as solo artists. With them I would put Paul Rutherford — although he is very English — as having fitted in with the German thing, the Wuppertal scene, and then being involved in the Globe Unity Orchestra. They have always had the European connection. I grew up with the Tippett band and then the Softs and got involved with offshoots of that particular area of music. I have always played with mates who have asked me to do something. I've always played with people I get on well with socially and musically. The only European recording situation I was involved with was at JAPO [**Boundaries**, 1980] which was the tax-loss offshoot of ECM. Whereas Evan and Lol always had dealings with FMP and nato."

While working with Carla Bley he got to know Roswell Rudd and hopes to be performing and recording with him over here this year. Yet, America remains elusive; he hasn't been there for 25 years.

"Maybe part of the US interest in the Canterbury scene is the mystique, the fact that it hasn't been sold to them, rammed down their throats. When we [Soft Machine] were over there, there was interest. Miles put us on opposite his band. And Ornette came to all our gigs in New York. But we didn't make any money!"

So, finally, what are Elton's general thoughts on the current state of the music scene.

"If I was young and coming up now, I would realise that you've got a battle on your hands. There is so much emphasis on career and taking care of business. There are young guys who are busy, who work a lot, and even they are packing it in. I see it as very difficult... then again, it always was. But then I've never really been part of the music industry." **R**

## DISCOGRAPHY

*As Leader*

**Elton Dean** (CBS 64539, 1971); **They All Be On This Old Road** (Ogun OG 410, 1976); Ninesense, **Oh! For The Edge** (Ogun OG 900, 1976); Ninesense, **Happy Daze** (Ogun OG 910, 1977); **The Cheque Is In The Mail** (Ogun OG 610, 1977); **El Skid** (Vinyl VS 103, 1977); **Boundaries** (JAPO 60033, 1980); **The Bologna Tape** (Ogun OG 530, 1985); **Welcomet** (Impetus IMP 18612, 1986); **Duos** (ED Tape 01, 1987-88); **Trios** (ED Tape 02); **Unlimited Saxophone Company** (Ogun OGCD, 1989 CD); **Quartet** (ED Tape 03, 1989); **All The Tradition** (Slam CD201, 1990 CD); **The Vortex Tapes** (Slam CD203, 1992 CD); **Two's And Three's** (Voiceprint VP 167, 1994 CD; this release contains some reissued material from the ED Tapes 01/02/03); **Silent Knowledge** (Cuneiform Rune 83, 1996 CD)

*Other Relevant Recordings*

(Please note; where an album has been reissued on CD only the reissue label has been listed)

Keith Tippett, **You Are Here... I Am There** (Polydor, 1969 CD); Julie Driscoll, **1969** (Polydor, 1969); Keith Tippett, **Dedicated To You But You Weren't Listening** (Repertoire, 1970 CD); Soft Machine, **Third** (1970, BGO CD); Soft Machine, **Live At The Proms** (Reckless, 1970 CD); Soft Machine, **Fourth** (Sony, 1970 CD); Soft Machine, **BBC Radio One, Live In Concert** (Windsong, 1971 CD); Soft Machine, **The Peel Sessions** (Strange Fruit, 1969-71 CD); Soft Machine, **Fifth** (Sony, 1971-72 CD); Soft Machine, **Triple Echo** (Harvest, 1968-76); Robert Wyatt, **End Of An Ear** (Columbia, 1971

CD); Heads Hands & Feet, **Heads Hands And Feet** (Island, 1971); Reg King, **Reg King** (UAS, 1971); Centipede, **Septober Energy** (DanDisc, 1971 CD); Mike Hugg, **Somewhere** (Polydor, 1972); Mike Hugg, **Stress And Strain** (Polydor, 1973); Hugh Hopper, **Monster Band** (Atmosphere, 1973-4); Alexis Korner, **Mr Blues** (Polydor, 1974); Bluesology, **Rare Tracks** (Polydor, 1975); Hugh Hopper, **Hopper Tunity Box** (Compendium, 1976); Hopper/Dean/Tippett/Gallivan, **Cruel But Fair** (Compendium, 1976); Various Artists, **Canteresque Compilation #1** (Musart, 1976-86); Various Artists, **Canteresque Compilation #3** (Musart, 1976-89); Julie Tippetts, **Sunset Glow** (Utopia Buli, 1976); John Stevens, **A Luta Continua** (Konnex, 1977-81 CD); Carla Bley, **European Tour** (Watt, 1977); Dudu Pukwana, **Diamond Express** (Freedom, 1977); Keith Tippett's Ark, **Frames** (Ogun, 1978 CD); Soft Head, **Rogue Element** (Ogun, 1978 CD); Soft Heap, **Soft Heap** (Charly, 1979); Ken Hyder's Big Team, **Under The Influence** (Konnex, 1984); Keith Tippett Septet, **A Loose Kit In A Gentle Wind Floating With Only My Will For An Anchor** (Ogun, 1984); Hopper/Dean/Tippett/Gallivan, **Mercy Dash** (Culture Press, 1985); Various Artists, **Horizons** (No Label, 1985); Harry Beckett, **Pictures Of You** (Paladin/Virgin, 1985); Phil Miller, **Cutting Both Ways** (Cuneiform, 1985-87 CD); L'Equip Out, **Pip Pyle's L'Equip Out** (52° Rue Est Re, 1985); In Cahoots, **Live 86-89** (Mantra, 1986-89 CD); Phil Miller, **Split Seconds** (Reckless, 1988 CD); Dennis Gonzalez Sextet, **Catechism** (Daagnim, 1987 CD); Soft Heap, **Live** (BYG, 1988); Anglo-Italian Quartet, **Put It Right Mr Smoothie** (Splasc(h), 1990 CD); Various Artists, **Passed Normal Vol. 5** (Fot, 1990-91 CD) Various Artists, **The Saxophone Phenomenon** (Slam, 1990-92 CD); In Cahoots, **Live In Japan** (Crescent Discs, 1991 CD); L'Equip Out, **Up!** (Too Much Records, 1991 CD); Joe Gallivan, **Innocence** (Cadence, 1991); Hewins/Dean, **Live At The Jazz Cafe, London** (Musart, 1992); Dedication Orchestra, **Spirits Rejoice** (Ogun, 1992 CD); In Cahoots, **Recent Discoveries** (Crescent, 1993 CD); Towering Inferno, **Kaddish** (TI Records, 1993 CD); Dedication Orchestra, **Ixesa** (Ogun, 1994 CD); Elton Dean & Paul Dunmall, **If Dubois Only Knew** (Voiceprint, 1995 CD); The British Saxophone Quartet, **Early October** (Slam, 1995 CD)

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# Video phile

## *Jean Painlevé*: scientist and surrealist; the last films of *Krzysztof Kieslowski*; the return of *Ben-Hur*; plus, film posters of the 1920s *Russian Avant-Garde* rediscovered...

**Surrealism And Science: The Weird World Of Jean Painlevé**
Dir. Jean Painlevé
*Connoisseur/Academy Video*
*CAV 036*
95 mins, Black & White/Colour

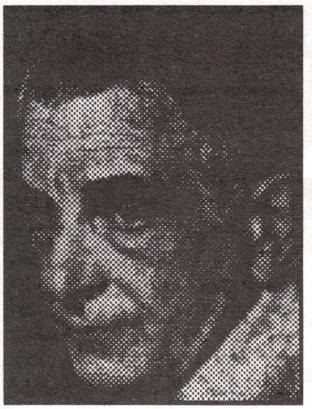
Trained as a biologist, Jean Painlevé (born 1902) soon became interested in experimental film-making. In 1924, he was a founder-member of the French surrealist group, contributing to the first issue of their journal. Appropriately, **Surrealism And Science** (nine short films from 1926-76) begins with **Mathusalem** (1926): five filmed inserts for a play by Ivan Goll. If its quirky superimpositions and sub-Sennett knockabout now seem dated, the film's mockery of high art (*Hamlet*), French military and religious ceremonies, illustrates Painlevé's taste for subversive wit and strange juxtapositions, both of which he would bring to his numerous short scientific documentaries — the medium in which he found his true voice. In **The Sea Horse** (1934), information about the reproductive cycle is enhanced by some cute, poetic observations about appearance — its "medieval aspect" and "dignified air". Painlevé makes good use of the now familiar documentary technique of ascribing human emotions and characteristics to animal behaviour. But this is not an anthropomorphic Disneyfication of the animal kingdom; while emotional identification is encouraged, the director/writer is always keen to assert the unique and strange complexities of animal life. **The Vampire** (1939-45), 'starring' the Brazilian vampire bat, is a fascinating blend of horror film grotesquerie (even intercutting sequences from FW Murnau's **Nosferatu**) and calm scientific analysis. **The Love Life Of The Octopus** (1965), possibly the highlight of this collection, becomes a bizarre sexual rite involving fear and tentacular entrapment; a powerful score by *concrète* pioneer, Pierre Henry, heightens the unsettling atmosphere. Elsewhere, music by Darius Milhaud, Duke Ellington and Chopin is used to set up strong visual-aural juxtapositions. Close-ups create abstract shapes, textures and patterns from the bodies of aquatic creatures that ripple and sway like kinetic sculptures. A key pioneer of the science documentary, Painlevé's innovative work remains fresh, fascinating and influential.

**Film Posters Of The Russian Avant-Garde**
Susan Pack
*Taschen (HBK £24.99)*

Unlike the celebrated Russian avant-garde cinema of the 1920s, little was known (particularly in the West) about the artwork that advertised these and other films to Russian audiences. Happily, Susan Pack has now rectified this situation with her wonderful, lavishly illustrated guide. In fact, many of the numerous film posters reproduced here are from her own private collection.

Like Russian cinema, poster production was state controlled. Print runs ranged from 8,000 to 20,000 copies — now only a few of each survive. Posters were ephemeral, with a life-span of just a few weeks, designed within tight deadlines, printed on poor quality paper, and often used again on the reverse side to advertise other films. But, the consistently high standard of inventive design is astonishing. Contemporaneous Hollywood and modern day efforts simply pale into insignificance against the audacious imaginations of neglected artists like Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Grigori Borisov, Anatoly Belsky, Nikolai Prusakov and Mikhail Dlugach who, true to their Constructivist principles, swept aside the hierarchical notion of 'Fine Art' superiority to the 'Practical Arts' by using the visual energy of radical techniques like photomontage, distorted perspective, non-naturalistic colour and geometric patterns for mass-produced designs. Treasurable.

*reviews*: **Chris Blackford**



# Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941-1996)

Taking up a theme that is central to his earlier work (a consideration of how ethical issues affect individuals in their everyday lives), the **Three Colours** trilogy by the Polish director/writer Krzysztof Kieslowski, who died in March this year, explores the ideals of the French Revolution (Freedom, Equality, Fraternity) in a contemporary setting. Although each film in the trilogy may be viewed independently, in **Red**, the final film, the fate of this disparate group of characters is cleverly brought together. However, not only does each film draw on a different group of characters, but the tone and style of each is very different.

**Three Colours: Blue** (1993) (*Artificial Eye ART 085*) is a visual delight with its use of coloured filters and lingering close-ups in which the stillness of the camera allows us to watch the central character Julie (Juliette Binoche) think and feel. Surviving a car crash in which her husband and daughter are killed, **Blue** is the story of Julie's attempt to come to terms with this tragedy and to 'free' herself from painful memories. There is a slow rhythm to the film; Kieslowski makes much use of symbolism to convey the long and difficult process of coping with loss. Recurring snatches of classical music (Julie's husband was a composer) connote the painful resurfacing of memory, whilst beautifully shot scenes of Julie swimming in a pool could be seen as representing a desire to cleanse and purify the spirit. Eventually, Julie's quest for freedom, which involves an attempt to become free of personal involvement and responsibility, is presented as rather empty and lonely, reinforced by the final lines of the choral work by her husband, which she is helping to finish: "If I have not love, I am hollow."

**Three Colours: White** (1993) (*Artificial Eye ART 100*) the second film in this series, addresses the ideal of equality. Without the slow moving symbolism of **Blue**, its style is more clearly narrative-based. Divorced by his French wife (Julie Delphy) on the grounds that their marriage has not been consummated, Polish hairdresser husband, Karol (Zbigniew Zamachowski), is left homeless and penniless on the streets of Paris. He returns to Warsaw by a very unconventional route. Yes, what follows is often quite bizarre and also humorous, the director cunningly interweaves strong feelings of passion and love with a darker strain of obsession, where 'equality' means getting even. However, **White** lacks the attention to visual detail that forms such an important part of the pleasures of both **Blue** and **Red**.

In what was to become his last film, **Three Colours: Red** (1994) (*Artificial Eye ART 105*), Kieslowski constructs another complex narrative structure with two storylines running in tandem, their links and points of reference becoming apparent as the film unfolds. Through the ideal of fraternity, **Red** explores responsibility, betrayal and survival, counterposing the optimism of youth, in the form of a young model, Valentine (Irene Jacob), with the cynicism and defeatism of old age — a retired judge played by the veteran French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant. One senses that Kieslowski values this ideal above the others. Where the pursuit of freedom has been held up as a lonely individualism, and equality as the imposition of sameness, the ideal of fraternity is interpreted as enriching and rewarding: a point emphasised when Valentine reaches out to help the elderly stooped woman, who has passed across the screen in all three films, to deposit her bottles in a bottle bank. It's a simple, yet unself-conscious act of humanity which resonates across this marvellous trilogy.

**Catherine Blackford**

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# Heroes & Haloes

***Ben-Hur* is back... Silent cinema's most lavish epic is now available on video. *Chris Blackford* assesses the impact of the big picture on the small screen**

**Ben-Hur: A Tale Of The Christ**
(1925) Dir. Fred Niblo
with Ramon Novarro, Betty Bronson, May McAvoy, Francis X. Bushman, Carmel Myers
*MGM/UA S051474*
143 mins, Black & White/ Tinted/Colour Sequences

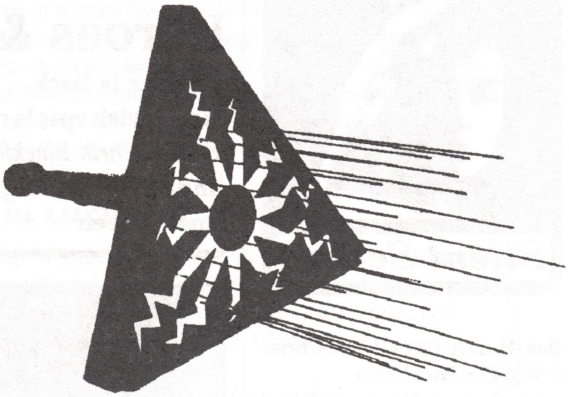
One can't help feeling that there's something a little bit ridiculous about watching **Ben-Hur** on a television screen, when the film was so obviously designed to communicate on a huge scale; but, strange as it may seem, not even a modest TV set can diminish the stateliness of its epic vision — the breathtaking energy of its action sequences, the grandeur of its monumental sets, swarming with extras.

These days the silent film version of **Ben-Hur** tends to be remembered (if it's remembered at all; most film fans now associate the title with William Wyler's 1959 remake, starring Charlton Heston) for its saga-like production problems in Italy and Hollywood, making it the costliest film of the silent era. Those wishing to follow the astonishing story of battles with Italian technicians (themselves

divided between fascists and anti-fascists), the often underhand changes in director and cast, and the life-threatening demands placed upon actors and extras during the shooting of key set-pieces, should read the chapter in Kevin Brownlow's indispensable **The Parade's Gone By** (Columbus Books).

What's often downplayed is the film's rattling good story with its heady mix of adventure, melodrama, history and mysticism. In accordance with the contractual demands of the script owner, the figure of Christ was never fully shown, instead implied by shots of sacred arms and shafts of radiant light. Actually it's a blessing in disguise, since the film is mostly untainted by the sort of mawkish sentiment typical of Biblical epics.

With a running time approaching 2 1/2 hours, **Ben-Hur** has surprisingly few *longueurs*; director Fred Niblo holds the attention, skilfully varying the focus of the narrative, cutting from general to particular and vice versa, thus enlivening the vast crowd scenes with many interesting reaction shots and cameo details. The stars, too, are impressive: Ramon Novarro as the aggrieved hero successfully balances action man heroics with romantic and familial tenderness; Francis X. Bushman plays Messala with bags of menacing swagger; and May McAvoy brings a heartfelt poignancy to Hur's long-suffering mother. The other (unseen) stars are the technicians and craftsmen responsible for the amazing sets and ingenious hanging miniatures, the staging and virtuoso editing of the sea battle and legendary chariot race, and the sumptuous cinematography. Carl Davis' powerful, unsentimental score further enhances this irresistible masterpiece. R



# Invention's Perspective On Improvisation

## Hal Rammel

*"Poetic logic is the sensuous apprehension of what we do not yet understand in the presence of reality."* Frederick Sommer (1)

I built my first musical instrument in 1976, a small *mbira* (thumb piano) with a wooden cigarbox-sized resonator and flattened steel rods fixed to the soundboard in a manner copied from a Nigerian *mbira* I bought many years earlier. I made perhaps a dozen of these, experimenting a bit with shapes, numbers of rods, and multiple rows of rods. All were intended for personal musicking. I began to experiment with string instrument forms a few years later, slowly, as ideas and raw materials presented themselves. It wasn't until the early 80s after taking up the musical saw, that I gained the confidence to become more public with my playing.

Much impetus to design and build new instruments comes to me through collaboration with other improvising musicians. While new forms and adaptations frequently arise by significant contributions of happenstance, playing technique is a vital experimental component, most fully stimulated in the context of group improvisation. Dedication to the exploration of opportunities that chance may present is a singular necessity, with a sense that the unexpected often holds greater treasures than the rigidly prescribed. Engaging my new instrumental voices with more familiar instruments played by individuals whose generosity of spirit and inventive imagination entwine to unfold a common sonic space, attracts me to a far greater degree than any inclination to construct an ensemble of newly invented instruments. I've chosen to focus briefly in this article on three instruments whose shape and sound have evolved by just such a process.

### snath

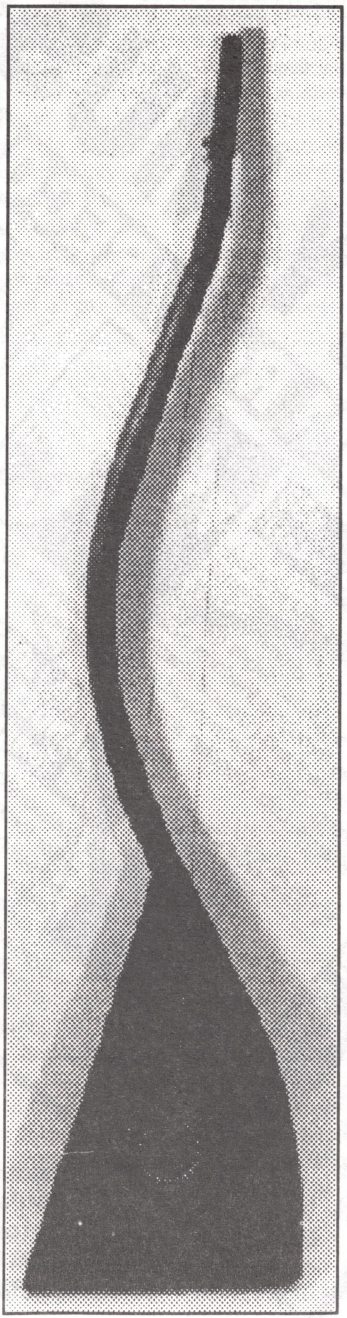
The scythe handle (snathe) that was to become the single-string **snath** sat around my home for many years before I formulated its design in 1983. My alertness to that handle's shape had been triggered by a sculpture by Arshile Gorky, who had found his inspiration in the shapes of ploughs' handles and blades. With this scythe handle the challenge lay in shaping a resonator around such a reverie of three-dimensional asymmetry. The high bridge offers 360° approach to the solitary string, as in other forms of the musical bow (eg, berimbau). Without a fingerboard, pitched sounds

are most readily available by use of a slide or by dampening the string with one hand and playing it like a string drum with the other. One or two toy drumsticks held in the right hand work quite wonderfully in this manner, and it has been in my collaborations with John Corbett's acoustic guitar that I've learned much about playing the snath, his guitar preparations cajole it most perfectly.

## triolin

I built the first triolin in 1985 using wood out of the bottom of a discarded dresser drawer and an old chair leg rescued from a Chicago alley. The five triolins I've built since then are of slightly different proportion, but each has the same configuration of triangular resonator pierced by a lathe-turned handle. The sounding rods (thin brazing rod) protrude vertically in circular arrangement out of the top. The rods extend only through the soundboard, not into the bottom of the resonator. I've grown to prefer the drier sound this offers. Some rods become more resonant this way (when the rods are fixed close to their nodes); others vibrate sympathetically. Over time (six months to a year) the rods become quite loose, rattling and striking one another as the instrument turns, and it becomes time to build a new triolin.

The first triolin was an abrupt departure from an initial intention to make a nail violin. I cut the rods in random lengths.



There are no even (or close to even) rises or falls in pitch. At times I've felt the intransigence of this instrument to be overwhelming. I called my first solo improvisations on the triolin 'Love Song For Little Lulu' in tribute to the panels of Marge Piercy's *Little Lulu* comic books when Little Lulu, forced to practice her violin, set forth an unforgettable "screeeeeeech" exploding out of the panel's borders. On the other hand, early reinforcement for the triolin's distinct, albeit vociferous, voice appeared to me in recordings of Inuit fiddle music.

**"Instrument building is my more labored response to the situational tensions of musical circumstance."**

I quickly found holding the triolin in my left hand, turning, spinning, or oscillating it against bow or mallet in the right, to be a very accessible approach and a way out of frustrations I felt in the past with instruments that required more refined dexterity in the left hand. Pitch may rise or fall by bowing up or down the length of a rod. Melodic fragments can be repeated or varied with fast or slow oscillations of the triolin against the bow. An improvisation may concentrate on a single section of rods or spin off in a whirl of furious harmonics. In spite

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### *p53* (ReR p53)

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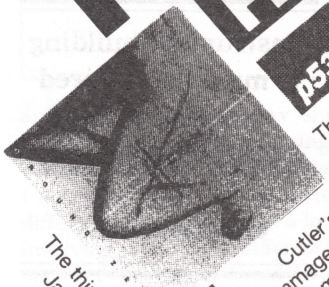

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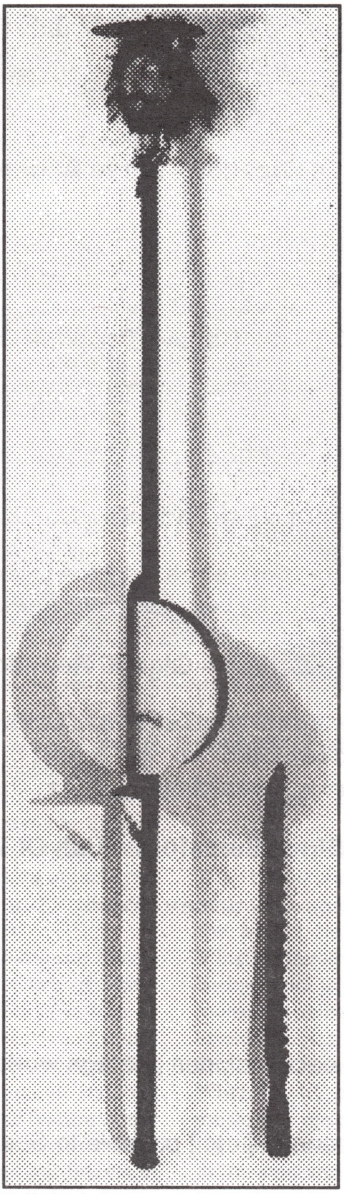
of a significant amount of unpredictability, musicality may be coaxed or, more often, wrestled from the triolin's angular body.

## devil's fiddle

The **devil's fiddle** (or the bumbass, bladder and string, etc.) defined principally by a small pair of cymbals perched atop a tall pole and a drum sounded by bowing a string stretched across its surface with a notched stick, appeared in my arsenal as part of research on these instruments for an article in *Experimental Musical Instruments* (2). As I improvised with an instrument originally designed for raucous carnival or street-corner percussion, I realized, beyond the limitations of its curious drumroll effect and lumbering thud (the high-hat is sounded by hitting the instrument against the floor), I was offered a way to approach percussion not so very different from the way I play the triolin. The left hand manipulates the body of the instrument against a mallet or bow in the right. The second devil's fiddle I built added a plethora of sounding elements as this technique made it possible to juxtapose wood, metal and skin sounds in a wide range of timbres with great ease. The work of John Stevens, Paul Lovens and Paul Lytton pointed me in directions such combinations might take. In this instrument I found percussion pitched squarely in the dynamic range I frequent in acoustic improvisation, played in much the same manner as I've developed in my hand-held instruments.



Instruments pictured — p. 26, *triolin* (1991); p. 27, *snath* (1990); p. 29, *devil's fiddle* (1990)

Improvising music has consistently reinforced my inclinations to devise, design and redesign sounding objects. Playing provokes the quest for other possibilities, a provocation felt most intensely in the course of small group improvisation, duos and trios, where the call for response is most acute. John Corbett, in an essay which touches on these concerns, describes instrument reconstruction as "redistribution of technique produced on the body of the instrument" (3). Instrument invention, drawing on John Corbett's phraseology, arises out of gestural redisciplining, invention or, perhaps, desperation in the fray of others' gestures. Instrument building is my more labored response to the situational tensions of musical circumstance. The vividness of such experiences readily impose their will in the workshop. The heart of this discussion lies in musical interchange, in unwillingness to close the door on either's experience of the other, directed toward meaning which may never appear quite clear in the face of sound's evanescence. Music's swift decay is fiercely defied in our desire to draw upon all of experience and all of imagining at the service of discovering and conversing in a mutual world. **R**

### NOTES

(1) Frederick Sommer, 'The Poetic Logic Of Art And Aesthetics,' *Sommer Words* (Tucson: University Of Arizona

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Press, 1984), p. 39.

(2) Hal Rammel, 'The Devil's Fiddle: Past And Present,' *Experimental Musical Instruments* Vol. VII, Nos 3 and 4 (November 1991 and January 1992).

(3) John Corbett, 'Ephemera Underscored: Writing Around Improvisation,' *Jazz Among The Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham Duke University Press, 1995), p. 234.

**Hal Rammel**, *American experimental multi-instrumentalist, visual artist, author, has released collections of acoustic and electroacoustic improvisations on the Penumbra Music label. He's actively involved with improvised music in the midwestern US, playing regularly with John Corbett, Terri Kapsalis and Steve Nelson-Raney. His long-standing duo with Swedish improvisor/instrument inventor, Johannes Bergmark, will reunite this year at the Newfoundland Sound Symposium.*

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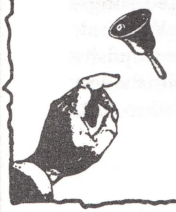

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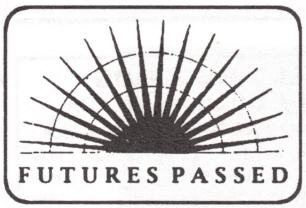
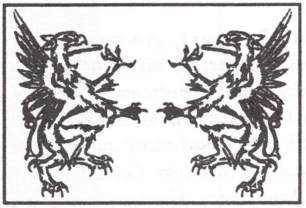



*Chris Blackford* **rummages through the CD reissues in search of the overlooked and underrated; plus, some recently discovered gems from the archives...**

When Ashton, Gardner and Dyke finally split in early 1973, drummer Roy Dyke had already joined ex-Yes keyboardist Tony Kaye, bassist Dave Foster and guitarist Brian Parrish in **Badger**, a short-lived, now largely forgotten but initially very promising progressive rock outfit. Their debut album, **One Live Badger** (1973) (*Repertoire REP 4373-WY*), recorded at The Rainbow, contains six neatly structured songs which expertly combine r'n'b, hard rock and jazz-rock styles. Musicianship is solid throughout with energetic and purposeful solos from Kaye's Hammond and Parrish's gritty guitar which eschew the sort of directionless virtuosity prevalent at the time. 'Wind Of Change', thematically the strongest piece, is superbly performed: rhythmically tight with discreet synth and mellotron coloration. However, Badger craved supergroup status; they tried a commercial follow-up which flopped, then fell apart. Pity. (*Repertoire: 0049 2361 94850*)

There was always something wonderfully over-the-top about early **High Tide**; instrumental passages that ought to have returned sooner rather than later to verses or choruses, just seemed to go on and on increasing in density and intensity. Eventually one realises that this sheets of sound attack is what really motivates this British group; that somehow Tony Hill's doomy Jim Morrisonesque vocals are there to lure you into the eye of the storm.

Not that the tunes aren't memorable. 'Pushed, But Not Forgotten' and 'Walking Down Their Outlook' stand out from **Sea Shanties** (1969) (*Repertoire REP 4414-WY*), their debut. But it's the ferocity of the dialogues between Hill's electric guitar and Simon House's electric violin — in particular 'Death Warmed Up' — that grab the attention. **High Tide** (1970) (*Repertoire REP 4413-WY*) went even further — just three tracks with minimal vocals and longer instrumental breaks that again showcased Hill's and House's ebullient powerplay over the sturdy Peter Pavli and Roger Hadden rhythm section. Their's was possibly the earliest violin-guitar pairing to work in this aggressive manner, welding hard rock riffing to bluesy-jazz improvisation. And, for sheer sustained firepower they outgun later, far more famous teams like Goodman and McLaughlin (Mahavishnu Orchestra) and Cross and Fripp (King Crimson), although 'The Joke', the group's most metrically advanced piece, includes some lyrical, acoustic folk episodes. They split soon after, though Hill assembled different line-ups for a few hard-to-find albums that trickled out during the late 70s and 80s.



**Gryphon** were one of the oddest of the 70s' progressives, playing eclectic rock with a piquant renaissance flavour, using krumhorns and recorders alongside conventional rock instrumentation. But they were no novelty act as **The Collection II** (*Curio ITEM CD3*) testifies — 15 selections from four of their five albums (1973-77), plus four previously unissued pieces. Early tracks show the group's sure touch with light-hearted traditional folk material; these followed by 'Gulland Rock' and 'Double Dutch', shorter instrumentals whose delightful melodic invention includes folk-rock, classical and renaissance influences. If their longer classical-rock instrumentals (excerpts here) now sound too grandiose for their own good, Gryphon's exceptional musicianship was at its sharpest in intricately arranged songs, like 'Fontinental Version', 'T.A.R.D.I.S.' and the exquisite 'Ashes' which rank with the best of Gentle Giant and Jethro Tull.

# alchemy & improv

Few writers would think of including **Third Ear Band** in a history of British improvised music, though improvisation has been at the heart of their distinctive music-making for over 25 years. Formed in 1968 by Glen Sweeney (percussion) and Paul Minns (oboe, recorder) from the earlier psychedelic group, The Hydrogen Juke-box, Third Ear Band emerged during the stylistically eclectic progressive era, making their debut in 1969 with the extraordinary **Alchemy** (*Drop Out, DO CD 1999*). Other members were Richard Coff (violin, viola), Mel Davis (cello, slide pipes), plus brief appearances by DJ John Peel (jaws harp) and violinist Dave Tomlin. The eight improvisations follow a similar pattern; Sweeney says in his notes that TEB pieces are "as alike or unalike as trees": a phrase that critic David Ilic would later borrow to describe the improvisations of AMM. TEB were no less intense — a remarkably focused group of improvisors who also eschewed overt soloistic virtuosity in favour of a closely-knit collective identity. Sweeney's hand drums supplied the strict, almost primal pulse from which a harmonic tapestry of woodwinds and strings was finely woven, but seldom in the pastoral vein this particular instrumental grouping suggests. Minns' oboe phrasing could sound as flinty, as bleak and aggravated, as the soprano saxes that Evan Parker and Trevor Watts were wielding in other UK improv circles. The track titles reflected the classical Indian and ancient mystical influences; the strings droned and meshed, creating a disorientating swirl of sombre colours.

**Third Ear Band** (sometimes called **Elements**) (1970) (*Beat Goes On BGOCD89*) developed these ideas through four longer improvisations, arguably the group's finest work. Ursula Smith had now replaced Davis on cello. While 'Earth' explores a folk dance motif through accelerated pizzicato, 'Fire' explodes into a frenzy of wailing woodwinds, high-pitch searing strings and pulsating percussion — in its own way as cathartic as Peter Brötzmann Octet's seminal **Machine Gun**.

TEB's skill at creating unusual and unsettling moods proved to be an ideal accompaniment to Roman Polanski's visually arresting, if gruesome, **Macbeth** (1971). Smith left, but Paul Buckmaster, Simon House (of High Tide) and Denim Bridges arrived, successfully blending electric guitars and VCS3 into the TEB soundworld. Surprisingly little of the essentially programmatic **Music From Macbeth** (1972) (*Beat Goes On BGOCD61*) appears in the film; it was used sparingly, yet most effectively, to emphasize the brutal pre-Christian ethical and supernatural aspects of the narrative. More melodic than previous albums, it's well worth investigating in its entirety.

Having achieved an international profile, the group then faded into obscurity, performing only sporadically during the late 70s to mid-80s. However, 1988 saw an unexpected 'reunion' gig in Italy — Sweeney and Minns now joined by Allen Samuel's spine-chilling violin and Mick Carter's mostly low-key, ambient electric guitar. **Live Ghosts** (1988) (*Materiali Sonori MASO CD 90004*) revealed a cohesive group still capable of producing absorbing and atmospheric improvisations with a hypnotic rhythmic base. 'Live Ghosts' and the extra studio improv, 'Necromanticus', showcased the subtle and expansive shades that Carter's guitar was contributing.

By late 1989, Paul Minns had bowed out; also Samuel. **Magic Music** (1990) (*Materiali Sonori MASO CD 90016*) introduced Neil Black's microtonal MIDI violin, and the soprano sax and flute of Lyn Dobson (formerly with Soft Machine). Dobson brought a flowing, often lyrical free jazz dimension to the existing ethnic pulse; Sweeney affixed the label "free ragas".

**Brain Waves** (1993) (*Materiali Sonori MASO CD 90045*), their latest, maintains this line-up but adds more detailed MIDI guitar and violin soundscaping, even two songs/chants. The album clearly demonstrates that while the Third Ear Band sound continues to evolve, the group remain true to a sensitive improvisatory approach which has always been the basis of their original and uncompromising work. (*Materiali Sonori: 0039 55 94 38 88*)

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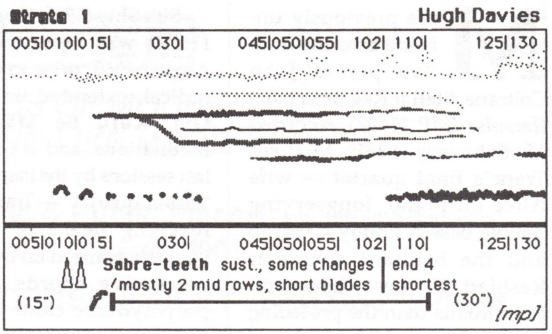
More previously unheard treasures from 'late period' John Coltrane. **Stellar Regions** (1967) (*Impulse IMP 11692*), recorded 15 February 1967, features Trane's final quartet — wife Alice on piano, longserving double bassist Jimmy Garrison and the brilliant drummer Rashied Ali. Less dense and tumultuous than the preceding **Meditations** (which employed two drummers and the extraordinary, high energy tenor of Pharoah Sanders), **Stellar Regions** is perhaps a more refined and concise synthesis of Trane's sublime thematic playing (that often attains the spiritual heights of **A Love Supreme**; 'Offering', originally released on **Expression**, even quotes the opening motivic call to prayer of 'Acknowledgment') and gripping, abstract *altissimo* fervour. 'Sun Star', 'Stellar Regions' and 'Iris' sound like free ballads, where Trane's movement between extremes in dynamics is always seamless and unforced — by now a natural expression of his ever deepening emotional sensitivity. Alice Coltrane and Jimmy Garrison basically supply the understated harmonic shading. Only Rashied Ali's incredible rhythmic agility is really able to fire Trane's imagination in the struggle for this new expressive language; their effervescent duetting on 'Configuration' is a taste of further marvels to come when **Interstellar Space** is recorded just a week later. **Stellar Regions** is a wonderful discovery, and a vital document of Coltrane's pathbreaking jazz.

**Sun Ship** (1965) (*Impulse IMP 11672*) was recorded on 26 August 1965, prior to the more radical, extended line-ups of **Om, Kulu Se Mama** and **Meditations**, and is one of the last sessions by the inspirational "classic quartet" — Trane's tenor reaching peaks of melodic intensity spurred on by Tyner's percussive chords and the polyrhythmic clout of Jones' and Garrison's rhythm section. The sound quality achieved by Impulse's 20-Bit Super Mapping process on these two releases is also rather special.

Originally on Turtle Records in 1971, **Flight** (*FMR CD26-L0895*) is an important early release by Howard Riley's pioneering trio with Barry Guy and Tony Oxley. 20-minute 'Motion' is a *tour de force* of motivic jazz statements linked by passages of textural free improv — Oxley's metreless sweeps across an extended kit open the way for Riley's Cecil-like piano and Guy's austere, amplified bass. Fine lyrical ballads, too. Some tape hiss, but strong ideas shine through.

Spontaneous Music Ensemble's **Summer 1967** (*Emanem 4005*) provides a crucial document of the early days of this seminal British improvising group, here featuring the duo of John Stevens and Evan Parker, and for two pieces (recorded in a less than attentive London coffee bar) augmented by German bassist Peter Kowald. Parker devotees should note that this CD replaces **Karyobin** as the saxophonist's earliest published recording (even earlier material featuring EP is on the way...). **Summer 1967**, like the later Stevens/Watts **Face To Face** (on Emanem CD) showcases SME's egoless, "conversational" approach to the then revolutionary non-idiomatic strand of improvisation. All selections are previously unissued. 'Listening Together 1 - 5' is music of great intimacy — nimble, gentle, reflective, alive with ever-changing detail. Stevens already possesses the polyrhythmic suppleness of a Rashied Ali, but has his own method of registering incredibly subtle gradations in pitch, tempo and attack. The younger Parker (a mere 23) was fast becoming a unique voice on the London scene, developing his non-idiomatic approach with few overt signs of US free jazz influence; here, his deliberately restrained tone and restricted dynamic range does recall the path-breaking work of Jimmy Giuffre (**Free Fall**, 1962).

Evan Parker's first solo recordings of 1975 (originally on Incus) have also made it to CD, plus four solo pieces from a later 1975 FMP studio session (first issued on Parker's very limited edition LP box-set, **Collected Solos**). **Saxophone Solos** (*Chronoscope CPE2002-2*) is a milestone recording in modern saxophony, and one of the most original solo albums of the last 20 years. 13 striking examples of Parker's early soprano sax experiments, exploring circular breathing and various difficult tonguing techniques, which create an extraordinary multiphonic, microtonal soundworld. Highly influential work. **R**




# My Invented Instruments And Improvisation

## Hugh Davies

As an extension of my initial involvement in live electronic music in 1964 I invented my first amplified instruments in 1967. My original intention was to create a wider range of sound sources, first for simple tape pieces and then for use in concerts, at a time when I owned very little equipment. Somewhat later I realised that I was actually inventing and playing on new instruments. This activity has turned out to be the principal area of my work as a composer and performer, but I have not abandoned writing music for conventional instruments and sometimes creating tape works (usually for dance), or performing in works by other composers on clarinet, keyboard instruments, baritone voice and live electronics (all of which have been recorded commercially).

An important stimulus for the development of my instruments has been my participation in collective free improvisations in concerts, broadcasts and recordings. From the early 1960s I performed in a number of works that offered to the performers various degrees of freedom, by composers such as Cage, Stockhausen, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff and Toshi Ichiyanagi, as well as in works of my own and later on by fellow-members of the groups Gentle Fire and Naked Software; later on my instruments proved to be suitable for some of these works. My early group improvisations with other musicians included Gentle Fire (1968-75; occasionally), Music Improvisation Company (1969-71; entirely), and Naked Software (1971-73; mostly), and other ad hoc free sessions.

### a new activity

Following two successful solo concerts in Switzerland in 1971 I began to concentrate more on performing solo; for many years I have also played occasional duos with fellow instrument inventors Max Eastley (since 1978, when he first began to improvise) and Hans-Karsten Raecke (since 1980, shortly after he moved from East to West Germany). More recently I was a member of a regrettably shortlived improvisation group the Ferals (1986-88, with Phil Minton, Roger Turner and Alan Tomlinson) and the Electroacoustic Cabaret (1988-93), which ended each concert with a group improvisation. I have had the opportunity to improvise with musicians from many countries, including the USA, Japan and the former East Germany and Soviet Union.

After several very limited amplified "auxiliary"

instruments built in 1967-68, my first effective solo instrument was **Shozyg I** (1968), followed soon afterwards by the partly similar **Shozyg II**. Each of these stereophonic instruments was assembled inside the empty covers of a book, Vol. 13 (SHO - ZYG) of an encyclopaedia *The New World Library: Knowledge*. Small resonant objects were mounted on two "islands", each amplified by a contact microphone. Being a composer I originally considered devising a detailed notation for my instruments, but only came up with written performance instructions; most of my solo compositions for my instruments have evolved from improvisations. At the time I thought that these two instruments were the conclusion of an episode, but it soon became clear that they were the beginning of a completely new activity. Soon the name "shozyg" became a generic title for all my amplified instruments, especially those inside unconventional containers.

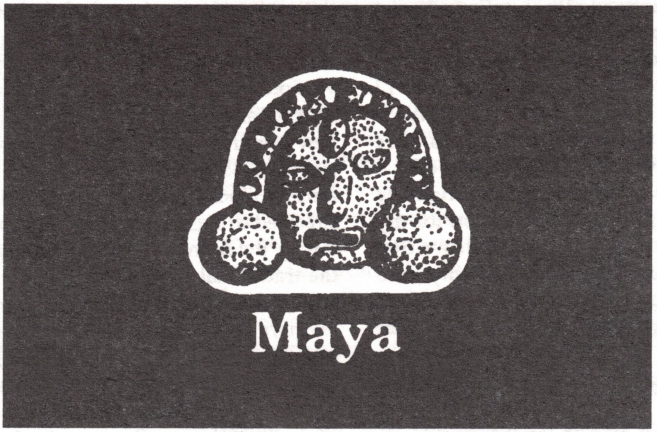
**Many of the most important developments in my work have come about by following my instincts and only later rationalising about what I had done.**

By 1969 I had added two simple found instruments, an egg slicer and short springs, that used the other principal type of special microphone, the magnetic pickup, removed from an old telephone, similar to that on an electric guitar. I was not the first person at that time to amplify an egg-slicer as a miniature harp, but I seem to have been the first to use a magnetic pickup rather than a contact microphone, revealing lower and richer timbres. My most commonly used sound source is the coiled steel spring. One type of longer spring was used in the first five (1970) of my family of twelve amplified **Springboards**, in which at least two springs are mounted like strings above a wooden board. Early in 1971 I devised the "bowed guitar string", in which one hand varies the tension of a metal string, the other end of which is clamped in an old record cartridge.

In 1972, I constructed the original (monophonic) version of my **Concert Aeolian Harp**; in 1980 an additional stereophonic section was added, and a new quadraphonic form of the instrument was built in 1985-86. These concert versions have thin fretsaw blades mounted in a holder instead of stretched strings, and are not blown on by the wind but by the human breath — sounding quite like the traditional instrument — as well as played with a variety of miniature implements such as feathers and a single hair from a violin bow (virtually invisible to the audience). **My Spring Collection** (1975) features 50 different springs which can be placed on or held across one or more of four pickups. Previously I had always performed sitting at a table with my instruments and mixer-preamplifier in front of me, providing a secure barrier between me and the audience that resembled something very familiar, the equipment bench in an electronic music studio. But My Spring Collection is self-contained, with everything mounted on a low stand behind which the performer sits. This important step was taken further in the two most recent instruments that I play regularly, with the performer now standing, both more confident and at the same time vulnerable: the 1985-86 version of the Concert Aeolian Harp and the **Multishozyg** (1990-92), containing a variety of sounding objects that are the equivalent of several separate instruments — including yet another version of the Concert Aeolian Harp — that can be bowed, plucked, struck and blown on; it is the only instrument in my composition **Shozyg Sequence No. 3**.

## spatial sound distribution

Other stages in my development include spatial sound distribution, with stereophonic instruments from 1968 and quadraphonic ones from 1979, and their inclusion, live or processed on tape in works by several other composers. For several years I considered combining my instruments with a tape, and finally did so in 1987 with **Strata** (see illustrations), featuring the new quadraphonic Concert Aeolian Harp. I have

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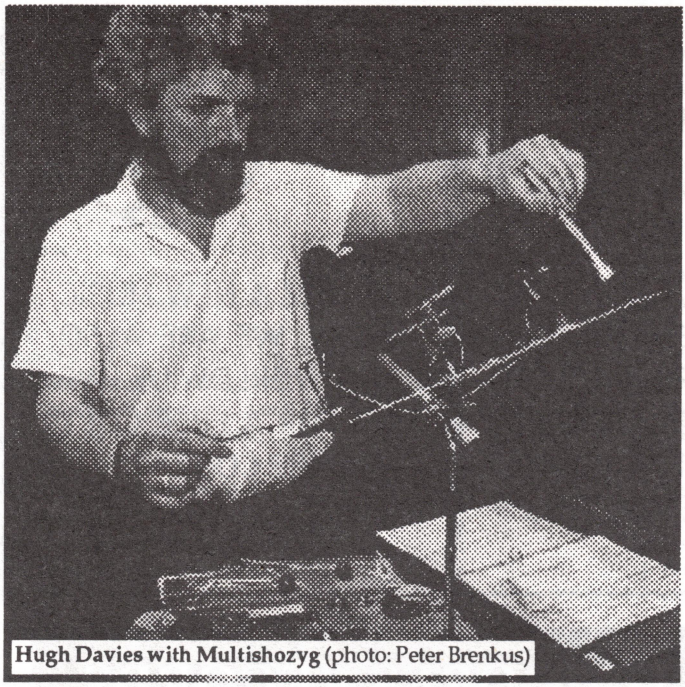

**Hugh Davies with Multishozyg** (photo: Peter Brenkus)

subsequently composed live parts for two earlier tape pieces originally made for dance. A similar expansion of my solo work, an idea that goes back about 15 years, is my performance as a concerto-like soloist with a conventional ensemble; this was finally achieved in 1994 in my composition **Inventio**, although I ended up making my solo part on the Multishozyg flexible so that it could be played by any improvising soloist.

My progression from studio composer to solo performer is mirrored in the work of many colleagues, and paralleled by that of untrained musicians such as visual artists (the work of sound sculptors like Max Eastley and Peter Appleton led them into inventing concert instruments and thus into improvisation). An additional feature of my solo concerts is the use, when available, of a video camera and TV monitors to show my fingers in close up (enabling the audience to make a clearer connection between what they see and what they hear), since their very small movements are equivalent to the hand and arm movements of other instrumentalists. This continues to intrigue audiences, since although my gestures are clearly related to the sounds that result, they bear little resemblance to those for traditional instruments.

Many of the most important developments in my work have come about by following my instincts and only later rationalising about what I had done. My greater involvement in free improvisation at the end of the 1960s was in no way premeditated, but it is significant that it began soon after the invention of my first instruments and developed in parallel with them. Thus I had much to learn in several areas: about free improvisation, improvisation in a regular group and building on its past collective experience, the possibilities of the new sounding objects I was exploring and the potentials of the resulting instruments.

## the "English sickness"

Early in 1969, I was asked by Derek Bailey, Evan Parker and Jamie Muir to become a member of a new improvisation quartet which became the Music Improvisation Company (MIC), bringing together experimental musicians with backgrounds in jazz, rock and classical music. Our music was at first called free jazz (although I enjoy listening to jazz, I could not play it to save my life!), but soon became known as free improvisation. When the MIC performed in Berlin in 1970 our free music was described by German improvisors as the "English sickness"; yet only a year later Peter Brötzmann and others had begun to move in the same direction.

Because the more delicate of the sounds when performing solo on my earliest instruments were lost in louder group passages, in the MIC I extended their possibilities with combinations

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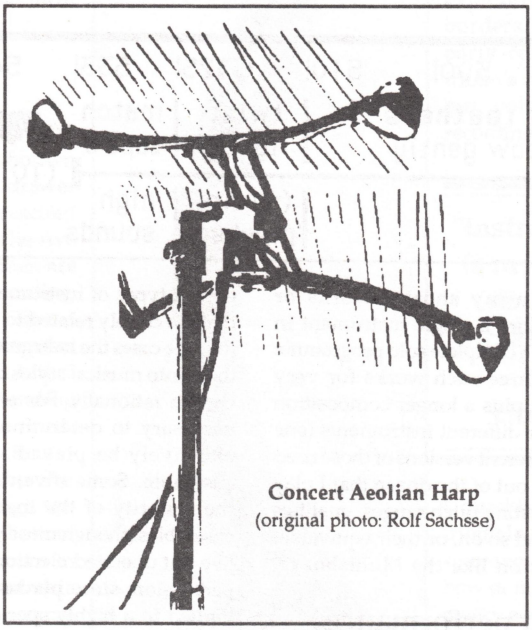
of up to three pedals. I eliminated my normal volume pedal by modifying my wawa and specially-made fuzz/phase-shift pedals so that either could be switched to control volume, and I also built a ring-modulator pedal. I am still surprised how much variety I was able to extract from these few simple early instruments; only five — plus a Hammond organ on one track — were used on the two LPs that the MIC recorded in 1969 and 1970. Gradually adding new instruments (totalling seven when the group ended early in 1971) increased my sound arsenal, making the pedals less important, and subsequently I have rarely used them. This was also partly due to the reason that, as a non-driver, I need to pack all my instruments for a concert into a single suitcase, so that new instruments took up the space previously occupied by the pedals.

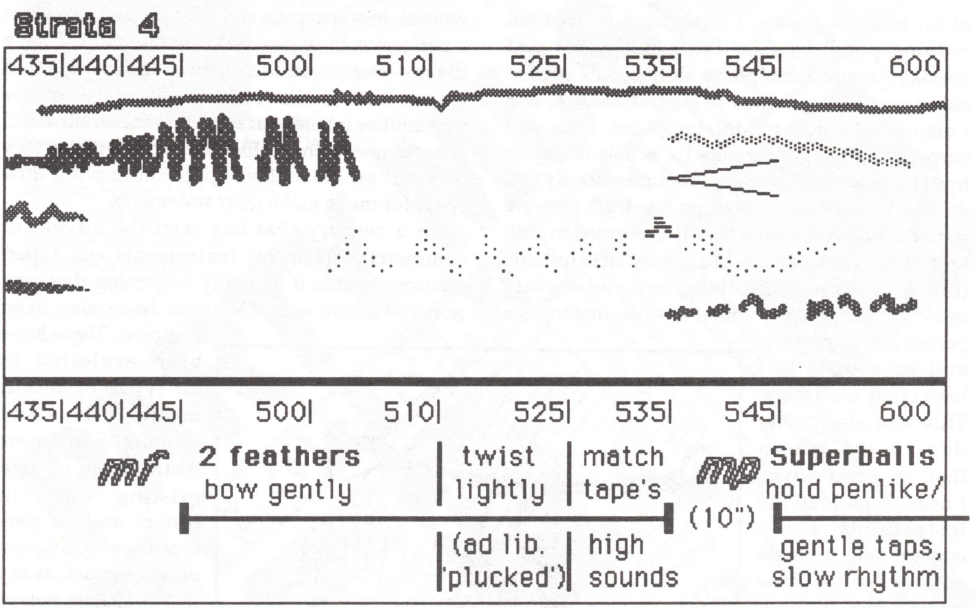
I also learned how best to organise my memory in performances. Usually I need to forget everything in order to avoid clichés and come as freshly as possible to the next performance, but this was partly to do with the fact that I continued to discover the capabilities of my instruments — at the time of the MIC's last concert the oldest of my instruments had only existed for three years. Similarly I have no fixed system for practising; I estimate off the top of my head how often and how long it will be necessary for me to practice in order to reach my peak for an approaching concert. Otherwise I may not even play my instruments for several days at a time. I have always accepted invitations to improvise with other musicians, even when their musical approach is radically different from my own rather reticent, less energetic style. By placing myself as a performer in improvisational situations I have discovered — and continue to do so, even on my earliest instruments — many of the possibilities inherent in them. On the whole I find saxophonists rather difficult to work with, as they often fill up the audible spectrum, leaving little space for me to make clear statements.

In a century that has seen the advent of commercial electronic instruments and taped electronic music it is hardly surprising that new non-electronic sound sources have also been explored. These have been exploited in all types of recent music, serious and popular. Some new instruments imitate existing ones in timbre and/or performance techniques, others — such as my own — chart newer territory. Lacking as they do a previous development spread over centuries, the latter in particular are more limited than traditional instruments, but since I have no wish to play earlier music on them this is not a problem. Like many of my colleagues I accept such limitations because they are offset by richer timbres that cannot be produced by conventional instruments, or only laboriously in an electronic music studio or on a synthesizer.



**Concert Aeolian Harp**
(original photo: Rolf Sachsse)

The normal sounds of my own instruments are often very close to those produced by extended or unorthodox techniques on traditional instruments. On recordings of groups like the MIC and the Ferals it is often hard, even for the musicians, to distinguish exactly who is playing what! My instruments can also create a timbral bridge between conventional instruments




and synthesizers. In my shorter works or improvisations I explore a single instrument in considerable detail. In a complete solo programme I normally include three such works for very different instruments, plus a longer composition involving at least four different instruments (one or two of which are different versions of those used for the shorter works, out of the dozen that I play regularly) with contrasting pitch ranges, qualities from pitch to noise and so on, or their equivalent in a single construction like the Multishozyg.

## design and performance

In improvisation you focus on responding to the immediate situation, either what is played by other musicians or, when performing solo, your feeling of the audience. You begin to sense, as must all solo performers of any kind, whether or not the audience is in tune with you. When a performance is going well I have often thought "yes, they are really with me, I can take the time to explore this passage more thoroughly", and when it is less successful "no, this isn't working well, I'd better go straight on to the next section."

Inventors of new instruments instinctively choose types of instruments and sound qualities that are closely related to their existing tastes, and in some cases the instruments themselves have led them into musical styles that they would not have chosen rationally. For any new instrument is it necessary to determine whether or not it can effectively be played solo rather than in an ensemble. Some inventors have created all or the majority of the instruments for their own ensembles (though mostly these are not performed live but operated electromechanically), primarily percussion, since percussion techniques are not limited to a highly specialised single instrument or instrumental family but are based on general-purpose stick and finger techniques. Most of my instruments proved to be amplified solo concert instruments, and I have also made a number of sound installations or sculptures, usually amplified or involving a simple electrical control system, to be played by visitors at exhibitions; some can be used in both situations. The few times I have needed to design an instrument for a specific piece of music it has been less satisfactory, and not flexible enough for other contexts.

When an improvisation can at any time

produce unpredictable relationships between the performers, you are often forced — on whatever instrument you are playing — to find a way to respond (accompaniment, answer or contradiction) appropriately to what one or more of the other performers is doing. The more familiar the musicians are with each other in a regular group, the greater the risks that can be taken. I described an example of what Derek Bailey called "mutual subversion" in the MIC for his book **Improvisation: Its Nature And Practice In Music**. Given the interest still shown in the group (at the time we played in modest venues for small fees — after one gig in London our fee only covered one round of drinks!) I continue to appreciate how lucky I was to start out in improvisation with the best improvisors in a group that became something of a landmark. **R**

**Hugh Davies** *(born 1943) is a freelance composer, instrument inventor, performer and musicologist specialising in the new sound sources of the 20th century. He has invented some 130 concert instruments, sound installations and sound sculptures, and given more than 170 solo concerts and lecture-recitals on his instruments, which are featured on 30 published recordings. His compositions have been performed and/or broadcast in 25 countries, and his sound sculptures exhibited in 11 countries. Publications include* ***International Electronic Music Catalog*** *(compiler; 1968), 305 entries in* ***The New Grove Dictionary Of Musical Instruments*** *(1984), contributions to five other dictionaries and chapters in 19 books and exhibition catalogues. Co-founder of several British and international musical organisations; Secretary of the newly-founded International Confederation for Electroacoustic Music (1982-86).*

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*As Composer/Performer*

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*As Improvisor*

Music Improvisation Company, **Music Improvisation Company** (ECM 1005, LP, 1970); Music Improvisation Company **Music Improvisation Company 1968-1971** (Incus 17, 1976, LP; CD reissue on Incus CD12); one track on **Ocean Of Sound**, (Virgin AMBT 10, 1996, CD); Hugh Davies/David Toop on **Improvised Music & Sound Works** (Audio Arts 4/2, cassette, 1980); **Circadian Rhythm** (Incus 33, 1980, LP); Borbetomagus, **Work On What Has Been Spoiled** (Agaric 1981, 1981, LP); Company, **Trios** (Incus 51, 1986, LP); Ferals, **Ruff** (Leo Records LR 138, 1987, LP); Peter Brötzmann/Hugh Davies/Phil Minton, **The Berlin Station** (FMP/SAJ-57, 1987, LP).

*As Performer In Works By Other Composers*

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*Videotape*

'Visiting Hugh Davies', **Other Sounds Vol. 1-11; Vol.1**, Trekanten Video Formidling, Copenhagen (non-commercial demo videocassette, 1994).

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**The Young Person's Guide**

# Prime cuts

**Non Credo**, Happy Wretched Family
(Victo CD033 CD)
**René Lussier & NOW Orchestra**, Le Tour du Bloc
(Victo CD036 CD)
Joseph Berardi and Kira Vollman are Los Angeles based Non Credo ("I don't believe/I don't think so"): he drums she sings; between them they also play cello, guitars, clarinets, keyboards. Their sound is clean and clear; textures are sharp; instrumental parts are dry and jumpy, with no unnecessary fat. Add the precise-yet-fluid quality of Vollman's voice (she's an ace at role-playing) and what we have is a very strange sort of miniature classical music by people who are uninhibited in their use of electric instruments and the studio (hmm... did anybody say 'progressive'?). **Reluctant Hosts** (their debut LP released in 1988 on German label No Man's Land) was very good. Now, fast-forward to the excellent **Happy Wretched Family**, where Berardi and Vollman, still aces at weird story-telling and scene-setting, push the envelope in inventing original textures while acknowledging their influences. Listen how in some episodes the drums/vocal axis echoes Chris Cutler and Dagmar Krause circa **Desperate Straights** (1975). Not to be missed.

In a 40-something sort of way 'eclectic' is René Lussier's middle name, as even a quick examination of the musicians-led, French Canadian Ambiances Magnétiques back catalogue will demonstrate. He's also a very fine guitarist — look no further than Victo's first title, **Nous Autres** by Frith & Lussier, or his contributions to the work of Les Quatres Guitaristes de L'Apocalypso-Bar on RéR. **Le Tour du Bloc**, composed specifically for the members of the NOW Orchestra, whose remarkable abilities were totally unknown to me, successfully integrates Lussier's influences in a coherent whole; the clear studio recording highlights the timbral shadings and the melodic variety of the charts — not to mention the jazz qualities of some solos. I suspect Lussier's guitar (underfeatured here and rightly so, when the goal of the session is taken into consideration) is still an integral part of his sonic palette. Check his recent **Le Corps de L'Ouvrage**, but the ensemble and solo qualities of the Orchestra reward repeated listenings. Just remember: if God is in the details, Lussier is in the big picture. (*Les disques VICTO, C.P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3*)
**Giuseppe Colli**

**Prima Materia with Rashied Ali**, Meditations
(Knitting Factory Works KFW 180 CD)
**Delta Ensemble**, Jours De Fête
(Viva Voce VV 4008 CD)
**Manfred Schulze Bläserquintett**, Konzertino
(FMP CD 70 CD)
In Prima Materia's disc, live at the Knitting Factory, Ali drives a quintet through, quite simply, the entire Coltrane **Meditations** suite of fond memory. However, alto and tenor make up the front line, there aren't two drummers, and the pianist is more at home than Tyner was. From the opening reed ululations, it's heads down and away; Ali isn't too well recorded, but comes through more and more as the suite progresses. As in the original, there are calming breaks for piano and bass; it's also welcome, to these ears, when Allan Chase's alto cuts in at the end of Louie Belogenis' first tenor solo. How this will be received is anyone's guess but, as Ali says, no one else is re-interpreting such extensive Coltrane compositions, so why shouldn't they?

**Jours De Fête** is puzzling: compositions and algorhythms for improvisation, no less. As reedman J-P Noguès solos, he triggers both computer software and an ensemble of trumpet, oboe, bassoon, strings, and the marimba, gamelan and software of Françoise Schanbroek. There are, it seems, endless possible variations in performance, though I found some of Noguès' pieces grew tiresome, preferring the more abstract one by Schanbroek.

Schulze's horn group was active in the GDR; one LP on Amiga, two on FMP (soon to be

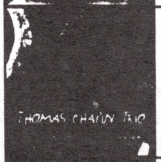
# Knitting Factory Works

## A quick guide to cool releases.

### Jazz

**Prima Materia**
Meditations
**KFW 180**
A Coltrane classic revisited with original Trane drummer Rashied Ali.

**Charles Gayle**
Testament
**KFW 174**
Gayle takes us on another free jazz excursion of soul and spirit.




**Thomas Chapin Trio**
Menagerie Dreams
**KFW 167**
A burning set from today's most dynamic jazz trio.

**Matt Darriau's**
Paradox Trio
**KFW 171**
Klezmer and gypsy jazz float through modern jazz compositions.

**New & Used**
Consensus
**KFW 163**
Dave Douglas, Andy Laster, Kermit Driscoll, Mark Feldman, & Tom Rainy.

**X-Legged Sally**
Land of the Giant Dwarves
**KFW 182**
A Belgian group that leans toward Zappa and musical mayhem.

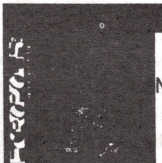
### Rock

**Joe Gallant & Illuminati**
The Blues for Allah Project
**KFW 188**
Jamming big band arrangements of the entire Grateful Dead classic.

**Suck Pretty**
3 Heads
**KFW 181**
Pop hooks to fun to be serious and too serious to be ignored.

**Kiss My Jazz**
Doc's Place Friday Evening
**KFW 196**
Belgian lo-fi rock slacker jazz abstractions w/ dEUS members.

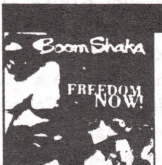
### Ambient Dub/Trip Hop




**DJ Spooky**
Necropolis: The Dialogic Project
**KFW 185**
Spooky's own mix of ambient, jungle noise, and trip-hop.

**Liminal**
Nosferatu
**KFW 170**
An "ill-bient" soundscape of of text, pop music, & primal rhythms.

### Reggae

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reissued on one CD). It was always a hard, uncompromising sound: ensemble chorales by trombone and four reeds, extreme textures, radical solos. On this new recording it's trumpet, trombone (Hannes Bauer), and three reeds (Gert Anklam on baritone replaces Schulze, too ill to play). 'Quintett No.1' is relatively conventional, but with striking solos (notably when Anklam takes over from Bauer). 'Hymne' and 'Konzertino' (Manfred Hering's clarinet taking the solo role) give further evidence of the flexibility of the writing. The long 'Quintett No.12' wanders at times, but has outstanding moments; Bauer explores his instrumental (and vocal) range, and Anklam is again formidable. This is a collective endeavour, however, and one to check out. (*Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard Street, New York, NY 10013, USA / Viva Voce, Musique en Chantier, "La Corderie", F-33880 Cambes, France / FMP distributed by Cadillac: 0171 278 7391*)
**Gerard F Tierney**

**ZGA**, Sub Luna Morrior
(ReR ZGA3 CD)
**Les Phônes**, Mythes et Légendes Phônes
(Audiorama Long 03 CD)
We should thank Chris Cutler for making ZGA better known outside their native Latvia. This third CD on ReR confirms them as a group of great inventiveness not just in making instruments but also in constructing musical contexts for them. If the careful architecture of their last release (**The End Of An Epoch**) suggested AMM, this album has a very different feel. Issued after the tragic death of group member Alexander Zhihlin last year, the emotional tone is complex. Short song or dance formats are explored with relentless irony — each track seems to end on the edge of a precipice, its underlying emotions just held in control.

Invented and conventional instruments are melded together, often with haunting beauty. ZGA have a control over scale: each sound is left to speak for itself, however distorted or constricted. They mention the influence of the Mnemonists' **Horde** album, although ZGA's sound manipulation lies in the instruments themselves, not in editing. Another parallel might be the soundworld of Czech improvising duo of Martin Klapper and Jindrich Biskup. However you place them, they are an original force.

The Belgian group Les Phônes (instrument inventors Jean-Claude Charlier and Franck Pillonetto with Marianne Ponlot) work with a variety of new wind, percussion, and string instruments with exotic names (stiltophone, rain column, etc). My favourite is the pongophone: a sort of table tennis table with a variety of possible surfaces that can produce interesting rhythmical effects. **Mythes et Légendes Phônes** is quite an effective showcase album for these discoveries, but it has a number of faults. There is far too little information on the instruments themselves. Production values are sometimes slack (or are we meant to hear the musician walk to the pongophone in track 4?). And, most importantly, the music is generally pedestrian, although the larger-scale pieces achieve a sort of statuesque charm. (*ReR, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England / Audiorama, BP 161, 67004 Strasbourg Cedex, France*)
**Nick Couldry**

**Richard Teitelbaum**, Golem
(Tzadik 7105 CD)
A pioneer of biofeedback music, live electronics, synthesizers, musical applications of microcomputers, pitch-to-MIDI converters and interactivity (before it meant peeking in Prince's bedroom on a computer screen) Richard Teitelbaum has done a lot; just check George Lewis' **Homage To Charles Parker** (Black Saint), Anthony Braxton's **Open Aspects** (Hat Art), and his own **Concerto Grosso** (Hat Art), **The Sea Between** (Victo) and **Cyberband** (Moers Music). **Golem** is an interactive opera whose main antecedents are **Golem Sketches** — a duet with Portuguese violinist Carlos Zingaro — and **Golemspeak**, with contributions from vocalist Shelley Hirsch. Of course, the CD version reproduces only the audio portion of the staged event — the included pictures hint at the intensity of the complete work, but in my opinion the music is rich and complex enough to stand on its own. With musicians like David Moss (a Pavarotti from hell), the aforementioned Lewis, Zingaro and Hirsch, whose usual vocal histrionics greatly benefit from a benign setting, plus Teitelbaum himself, this is not

your typical opera. Solemn and intriguing, it's fascinating listening; just cue track four: the sampled gospel congregation, the following keyboard interlude, that inimitable trombone — all speak of a rich, rewarding work. (*Tzadik, 61 East Eighth Street, Suite 126, New York, NY 10003, USA*)
**Giuseppe Colli**

**Network,** Volume Two: 54 Music Miniatures (Discus 5CD)
**Various Artists,** Unknown Public: Eclectic Guitars (UP06 CD/MC)
Compilations are usually unsatisfactory affairs. Instead of a rewarding musical journey, it's two paces here, one here, three here... ending up not far from where you began. The proposition that you get to hear people you wouldn't otherwise seek out is counterbalanced by the fact that you hear them out of context. At best you get a superficial overview of an area of musical activity. Having said that, these two CDs have interesting approaches.

At face value Network is the most promising. Musicians are asked to provide pieces no longer than 90 seconds. The compiler, Martin Archer (himself a musician of note and well represented here), edits it all together in a seamless flow, ordering the tracks into three movements — 'Urban', 'Pastoral' and 'Internal'. The result is perhaps intended to be a grand work made up of short components but it's really no more than a compilation in which silence is forbidden. I'm reminded of those gigs where your last note is still alive and the resident DJ comes crashing in as if a second's silence would spoil the party. But the real problem here is that too much of the material is weak. It has some great moments — the contrasting guitar excursions of Yasuhiro Ohtani and John Jasnoch, Martin Klapper's domestic percussion piece and Simon Fell's 55 overdubbed basses are all excellent — but without space to breathe even these tracks lose their resonance.

**Unknown Public** is, of course, the quarterly audio magazine. Instead of the homogeneous approach of most compilations, it has regular 'features' — "Work In Progress", "Scratchpad", "Contemporary Classic". It's put together in a refreshingly quirky way. Instead of attempting a comprehensive overview of the state of guitar based art it offers some fine examples, many of which would not see the light of day without such a venture. I particularly like the electronic pieces by Giles Gobeil and Dave Draper (the first a startling and complex composition realised by René Lussier, the second a delicate multi-layered improvisation), GF Hall's flamenco style 'Sandstorm', the apocalyptic 'Nagasaki Bells' by Robert Poss, the near minimalist piece by Elliott Sharp, the aptly named 'Chase' by Michael Starobin for computer-generated tape and guitarist David Starobin, and the featured "Contemporary Classic" — Frank Zappa's visionary 'The Chrome Plated Megaphone Of Destiny'. I may have ended up not far from where I began, but thanks for the dance. (*Network, c/o Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / Unknown Public, FREEPOST (RG2558), Dept PU6, P.O. Box 354, Reading RG2 7BR, Berkshire, England*)
**Gus Garside**

**The XIII Ghosts,** Giganti Reptilicus Destructo Beam (Scatter 04 CD)
**X-Ray Eyes,** X-Ray Eyes
(Megaphone Limited 007 CD)
If testament is needed as to the healthy state of British free improvisation then one is provided by this excellent release. Alex Ward and Switch are aided and abetted by a collection of the finest of Britain's younger improvisers, including Nick Couldry and Pat Thomas, plus Aussie Jim Denley. The diverse range of influences apparent on The XIII Ghosts' release range from John Zorn, via Lol Coxhill to Derek Bailey and Evan Parker. The group extend a fairly traditional improvising vocabulary with referential material, samples and spoken text. Its 45 miniatures jump from area to area often cutting off sections mid-stream without a noticeably negative effect. The kitsch B-movie title pervades the feel of the music and although no obvious narrative is present there is a soundtrack-like quality to the whole. There are a few self-consciously hip moments but to a great extent this temptation is avoided.

X-Ray Eyes comprise Caroline Kraabel (of The Honkies) and Jason Willett (ex Half Japanese), each playing a wide range of instruments. There is a hit and miss quality to this music, as it piles noise upon

noise, jumps from reference to reference and experiment to experiment, never being satisfactorily resolved. Its raw uncensored nature throws the listener between fascination and dissatisfaction. Whereas The XIII Ghosts appear very sure of what they are trying to do, X-Ray Eyes often sacrifice coherence in an apparent desire to be experimental. This quality can also be a strength as some of the least restrained moments present some of the most interesting music. One of the major weaknesses is in the inclusion of rather weak composed elements and some embarrassingly bad poetry. At its best it presents a challenging and fascinating array of sounds and surfaces, at worst it is incoherent and undisciplined. That you keep listening may be in part due to the music's powerful and unremitting energy. (*Scatter, (0/2) 30 Carnarvon Street, Glasgow G3 6HS, Scotland / Megaphone Limited, P.O. Box 2982, Baltimore, NM 21229, USA*)

**Bruce Coates**

**p53**, p53
(ReR P53 CD)
**Curlew**, Paradise
(Cuneiform Rune 80 CD)

p53 (named after a gene which "plays an important role in instructing malfunctioning cells to suicide so that they don't reproduce and create havoc") is an aural record of a project which Chris Cutler brought together for the 25th Frankfurt Jazz Festival in 1994. It juxtaposes two grand pianos — Marie Goyette and Zygmunt Krauze — with drums, electronics, samples, computers, turntables. This produces interesting contrasts between the (old-style) technique-based piano playing and the (new-style/postmodern) use of ready-made sources. These are often reminiscent of sections of "The Ying Tong Song", with the classical players being assaulted by noise and effects! Although the 48 minute piece is continuous, on the CD it is indexed into 25 tracks each lasting around 2 minutes, "making it easier to move around the disc — or to isolate, study, re-sequence, shuffle, cycle, or skip." So, Random Play produces an endless variety (well, over 10 to the power 25) of different combinations, full of jump-cuts and odd juxtapositions. You need never hear the same piece twice. Such playfulness with the medium is worthy of Christian Marclay.

In contrast, Curlew is more conventional, both in form and in content. They are an American five-piece band, with George Cartwright's alto and tenor saxes prominently featured alongside the twin guitars of Chris Cochrane and Davey Williams. Former members of the band include such distinguished names as Bill Laswell, Fred Frith (aha! the Henry Cow connection), Wayne Horvitz, Nicky Skopelitis, but this is not a band trading on its past. Cartwright composed the majority of the 10 tracks, and also leaves room for improvisation. The music is an intriguing collision/collusion between New York avant-garde and Southern forms such as blues and soul. The overall effect is of John Zorn playing Stax, or Ornette recording at Muscle Shoals. (*Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, Maryland 20907-8427, USA*)

**John Eyles**

**Somewhere In Europe**, Savage Dreams
(These Silences TSCD2 CD)
**DJ Spooky**, Necropolis: The Dialogic Project
(Knitting Factory Works KFW 185 CD)
**Various Artists** Variations: A London Compilation
(Paradigm Discs PD 01 CD)

Somewhere In Europe is the duo of Andrea James and David Tiffen, and this is their third CD. Working with sampling and editing techniques, they claim to have achieved a mix where "modern urban life is entangled with a sympathy for a rural pagan cosmology". Yes, there is some progression from the pieces where familiar music styles are distanced through noise to those where a more personal message fights to be heard. The problem: each track works simply by slapping soundworlds down alongside one another, after that there is virtually no development. Occasionally the material can stand such a crude approach, but on most tracks the irony wears pretty thin.

There's also no shortage of verbal claims accompanying **Necropolis**, DJ Spooky's mix of New York experimental music (what about 'Heterotopian Trace' as a track title?). Fortunately, the music sweeps this bombast away. Style references range from dub to trip-hop to jungle, but what holds it all together is a restless search for form in times of intense aural saturation. The

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strongest architecture comes from the track by Byzar — a brilliant spiral of lost voices, never settling. Also memorable is Sub Dub's claustrophobic dub track where every attack seems to rot in the air. It's not all that well focused, and after 76 minutes I was pretty sated with delay pedal. Even so, this is an album well worth exploring.

**Variations** (which is produced by Clive Graham of Morphogenesis) comes without hype but the music is anything but withdrawn. Familiar names (John Wall, Alquimia) join names which need to be better known. Each track is strongly individual but together they open up a little known side of London's experimental music scene — from John Grieve's startling exploration of saxophone frequencies, to Adam Bohman's hilarious and unsettling 'talking tape', and Andrew Jacques' precise soundscape. All the tracks explore sound beyond its normal sites of production. Sometimes the inspiration runs very high — the opening of Crow's piece for voice manipulation or much of Alquimia's 'The Nagual'. Throughout this compilation there is a clarity in taking musical risks that is worth acres of album cover hype. Superb and daunting. (*These Silences, c/o World Serpent Distribution, Unit 717, Seager Buildings, Brookmill Road, London SE8 4HL / Paradigm Records, c/o 9 Thane Mansions, Thane Villas, London N7 7PE*)
**Nick Couldry**

**William Hooker/Lee Ranaldo/Zeena Parkins**
The Gift Of Tongues
(Knitting Factory Works KFW279 CD)
Drummer William Hooker, harpist Zeena Parkins and Lee Ranaldo from Sonic Youth in two feedback sorties — 'Colour (The Hypnotic State)' (16 minutes) and 'Stamina' (53 minutes). Complaining that this isn't John Butcher and Phil Durrant in pin-drop duet is not the point. Once they lift off — about 10 minutes into 'Stamina' — it becomes evident that the musicians are listening to each other intensely, and it is fascinating to hear big-volume sounds associated with kill-your-parents grunge being weighed and measured against each other with a sense of abstraction. Sonic Youth are militantly new wave and eschew blues and heavy metal pelvis-moving licks, preferring an 'experimental', disembodied psychedelia — Ranaldo plays as he does with them. Zeena Parkins' electro-harp has a more suggestive twang as she twists up complex chimes and textures. It's Hooker's show — he keeps everything coherent with patiently bouncing beats and a lovely rounded drum tone. Much KnitFac 'deconstruction' congratulates itself for every tiresome interruption and reference — this conjures big metallic dustclouds and works them through. Once you've got a finger on the volume knob, all talk of "too loud" is simply policing which sonic associations can be referenced by improvisors. These musicians are taking each other's playing seriously and we should too. Shimmering stuff.
**Ben Watson**

**Act Of Finding**, Act Of Finding
(O.O. Discs 018 CD)
**Joe Maneri Quartet**, Let The Horse Go
(Leo Records CD LR 232 CD)
"Between the four of us, we are one soloist," says Act Of Finding's bassist Ratzo B. Harris. Well, not really! For most of these New York improvisors' debut recording we are subjected to an odd combination of songs stylistically culled from contemporary composed music, (the influence of Harry Partch is evident on the found text based first track), accompanied by sweetened noise-making. Thomas Buckner's voice is not unpleasant but nothing special, making the prominence given to him somewhat puzzling. Most interesting is the instrumental piece 'New Territory'. Here Buckner employs extended vocal techniques, however his expressive range is limited. This piece allows Harris to shine, revealing a prodigious talent. Tom Hamilton's delicate synthesizer work does little to lift the monotonous feel of much of the music and guitarist Bruce Arnold often bewilderingly insists on emulating Bill Frisell's whining sound. The recording is further hampered by an unpleasant shiny veneered surface, which removes any of the few teeth it may otherwise have had.

American saxophonist and clarinettist Joe Maneri's group has a more familiar feel. This is traditional (sic.) free improvisation played by an almost standard quartet — the one significant difference being Maneri's son Mat on violin. There

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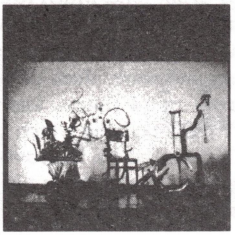
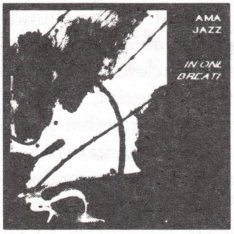


**LEO LAB CD 018**
**GHOST-IN-THE-MACHINE**
**featuring**
**EVAN PARKER**

Is there new music in Denmark? But if there isn't, would Evan Parker mess about with amateurs? "Ghost-in-the-machine" was formed in 1987. Since that time many a famous musician has palyed and toured with the group: John Tchicai, Peter Brotzmann, Pierre Dorge, Paul Rutherford, etc. Recorded live during two concerts the group created 11 spontaneous compositions of totally unpredictable music. Duration – about 70 minutes.

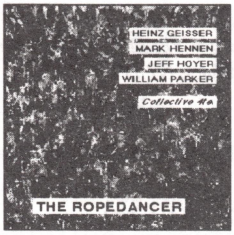
**LEO LAB CD 019**
**Moscow Composers Orchestra featuring SAINKHO NAMCHYLAK;**
***AN ITALIAN LOVE AFFAIR***

Recorded live at the Bolzano "Jazz Summer" Festival in June 1995 to the highest critical acclaim and standing ovation of the audience. The line-up of MCO reads like "who is who" in Russian new music. The leader of the MCO, however, is a bi-lingual Brit, Vladimir Miller, who writes the music and doubles as a conductor and a piano player. But aren't you curious to hear the Tuvan throat-singing Diva, Sainkho Namchylak, with a big band?




**LEO LAB CD 020**
**AMA JAZZ**
***IN ONE BREATH***

The most mysterious recording that reached Leo Records' quarters from the Urals (a mountain ridge that separates Europe from Asia). AMA stands for "Association of Musicians of Avant-garde". AMA-JAZZ is a quartet (piano, sax, drums, el.bass) that plays highly charged, powerful, passionate, intuitively structured music. They are of The Ganelin Trio school, and like The Trio in the past they will be compared to the Art Ensemble of Chicago.




**LEO LAB CD 021**
**COLLECTIVE 4TET**
***THE ROPEDANCER***

"Collective 4tet" is three New-Yorkers and one Swiss. Hainz Geisser – perc., Mark Hennen – piano, Jeff Hoyer – trombone and William Parker – bass. "This music is 'about' nothing more or less profound than the creative use of sound as it affects and represents the spirit. It's the aural manifestation of our common humanity. This music is to **hear**, music to experience" (from liner notes by Chris Kelsey).

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is an almost pregnant quality to much of the music, as most of the time they hold back the full force of their playing, delivering it only in short bursts. There is little new about Maneri's saxophone work but on clarinet a refreshingly distinctive voice is evident. Son Mat often tends to shadow his father and so never realises his full promise. There's an almost European flavour to this music, reflecting the approaches of many British exponents of the form, in particular, the rather covert treatment of jazz related elements. The freshness of this music is welcome and shows that the old form has still much to give. (*O.O. Discs Inc., 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA / Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*)
**Bruce Coates**

**Howard Riley**, Feathers With Jaki
(Slam CD215 CD)
**Mal Waldron/George Haslam**, Two New
(Slam CD306 CD)
Since he started Slam at the turn of the decade, George Haslam has built up a formidable catalogue that grows stronger with each release. These two new Slam releases are both atypical in some way, though. **Feathers with Jaki** consists of material previously available on vinyl on Leo and Spotlite, and is Slam's only reissue. Monk's 'Round Midnight' and 'Straight No Chaser', are duos with Jaki Byard, taken from **Live At The Royal Festival Hall** (Leo), recorded in 1984. At the start, the two pianists are tentative, giving each other rather too much room. As they slowly warm up, the piece builds to a thunderous climax. The second track continues at this pitch, with the two trading phrases at high speed. The remainder consists of the entire **Feathers** album, a classic trio session with Mario Castronari and Tony Marsh. This is a wonderfully sympathetic grouping, with each member in top form, but each contributing to the whole. Slam deserves our unqualified thanks for rescuing this music from "the vinyl graveyard".

Mal Waldron is one of the few overseas players to appear regularly on Slam. **Two New** is the third release to feature him, the second to feature the Waldron-Haslam pairing. The music is a mixture of standards, original compositions and improvised pieces, with the four improvisations forming the heart of the album. On three of these, instead of baritone sax, Haslam plays tarogato, a Hungarian wooden instrument similar in appearance and sound to a soprano sax. The two players mesh well, their sounds and styles complementing each other. Haslam has the knack of producing long fluent lines that belie the fact that he is improvising. Waldron is at his best in an improvising duo, a combination of accompanist and soloist. (*Slam, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 2DX, England*)
**John Eyles**

**Joseph Celli**, Video Ears Music Eyes
(O.O. Discs 0022 CD)
Joseph Celli is a notable American double reed player, improvisor, composer and mixed-media artist (see **Rubberneck 18**) — and it is in the last arena that this project is located. In performance, the musicians are surrounded by video screens which focus, dissect and multiply the minutiae of their activities. The album opens with one of Celli's long-term associates, Jin Hi Kim, on solo komungo (a six-string Korean zither which originated in the Fourth Century, played by plucking with a bamboo stick). Its harsh sound is reminiscent of a banjo with a smaller range but greater capacity for inflection. Following on from this, the multi-layered percussion of Brian Johnson sounds positively lush. But it is the next track, the elaborate 'Andes', that gives the album its key. It is performed by Peruvian musicians who attended a two-week residence led by Celli. His concern here, as throughout, is to compose in response to the instruments' sound rather than their cultural heritage. And yet in this, and in his declared intention to write for specific players, he seems to have found a way of working with and respecting diverse traditions within a narrow band of compositional strategies. As the tracks unfold, activity and multi-layering increases — as activity increases, rhythms intensify and tonality rises. In his pieces for the saxophones of Ulrich Kreiger, and the solo violin piece of Malcolm Goldstein, he works from bottom to top of the instrumental range. Structurally simplistic, yet dazzlingly effective and complex in effect, this album rewards repeated listening. R
**Gus Garside**

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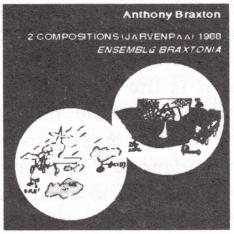
# LEO RECORDS NEW RELEASES SPRING 1996

**CD LR 231**
**SAINKHO NAMCHYLAK / NED ROTHENBERG**
***AMULET (selected recordings 1992 – 95)***

All 13 pieces included in this CD have been recorded live at different venues: Berlin, New York, Santa Fe, Montreal, Toronto, Tallin, etc. This unique cross-cultural duo breaks new ground, forging unimaginable connections between New York's urban vanguard and Tuvan folk wisdom. Brilliant soloists each, together the music of Ned Rothenberg and Sainkho is in a category all its own. Duration 69'46.

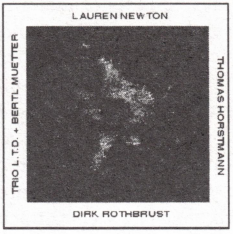
**CD LR 232**
**THE JOE MANERI QUARTET**
***LET THE HORSE GO***

68 year-old saxophonist Joe Maneri was a discovery of 1995 in the wake of LEO LAB release **"Get ready to receive yourself"**. On this recording Joe Maneri leads his fellow musicians Mat Maneri (violin), Randy Peterson (drums), and John Lockwood (bass) to new heights in creating micro-tonal spontaneous compositions. 11 pieces of different durations, recorded in 1995. Brilliant liner notes by all members of the quertet.




**CD LR 233**
**ANTHONY BRAXTON**
***2 COMPOSITIONS (JARVENPAA) 1988; ENSEMBLE BRAXTONIA***

"Ensemble Braxtonia" is an 8-piece chamber orchestra created with the idea of playing Anthony Braxton's music. In 1988 "Ensemble Braxtonia" made a tour of Finland organised and sponsored by the Finnish Jazz Federation. On this live recording "Ensemble Braxtonia", led by Braxton himself, performs two compositions (N. 144 and N. 145) which are merged into one uninterrupted flow of sound. Duration 70'21.




**CD LR 234**
**LAUREN NEWTON / THOMAS HORSTMANN / DIRK ROTHBRUST + BERTL MUETTER;**
***TRIO L.T.D.***

TRIO L.T.D.'s music augmented by the voice and trombone of Bertl Muetter is built on the mutual understanding of improvisation. However, the listener is also involved in their endless process of musical development. Recorded live during two sessions, this CD provides 67 minutes of breathtaking virtuosity combined with subtlety and consideration.

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# ShortCuts

*Reviewed by*
**Chris Blackford**

## First, new experimental jazz releases from Italy... past and present...

**Art Studio** began as a quartet in 1974, with top reedsman Carlo Actis Dato (a central figure in Italian new music) and guitarist Claudio Lodati their composers and most distinctive voices until the group's demise in the late 80s. **The Complete C.M.C. Sessions** *(Splasc(h) CDH 503/504.2 2CDs)* contains four complete albums from 1978-85. **Diagnosi** (1978) displays the strong thematic influence of Ornette Coleman; the melodically inventive Actis Dato/Lodati axis allowing Fiorenzi Sordini and Enrico Fazio freedom to loosen rhythm section strategies. With US pianist/vocalist Irene Robbins, the quintet on **Paralisi** (1981) takes a more liberated direction, while continuing to improvise around composed heads — the 15-minute 'Acquario' is the most compelling, texturally radical piece of the collection.

**Presagio** (1984) and **Pensieri** (1985) move further into the mainstream of European free jazz; parts of the latter even stray into bland fusion. However, collective cohesion provides the basis for some elegant and energetic tracks. Actis Dato's tenor and baritone work is the most persuasive force over the two discs — richly melodic, fierce and fiery. Art Studio fully deserved their reputation as one of Italy's foremost 70s/80s experimental jazz groups. Hopefully, this rewarding, if sometimes uneven, collection will bring wider recognition. *(Splasc(h) Records, via Roma 11, P.O. Box 97, 1-21051 Arcisate, Italy)*

Passion, personality and unpredictability are all high on the agenda for **Pino Minafra** and his Sud Ensemble, who make their recording debut with **Sudori** *(Victo cd034 CD)*. Now in his mid-40s, the still under-recognised Minafra has performed and recorded with many of Europe's leading improvisors, some of whom feature in the impressive Italian Instabile Orchestra (check out their excellent live album on Leo Records) which he established in 1990. Collaborations with mischievous Dutch masters, Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink, have left a lasting impression on this Bari born trumpeter whose compositions abound and resound with improvisatory high spirits. Yet, Minafra never overplays the joker, mindful that riotous slapstick works wonders when juxtaposed by glorious Latin dance moods; his solos on 'Au Fond...' (rococo, bluesy) and 'Rosso E Nero' (soulfully Spanish) are a joy. Versatile and authoritative support comes from Carlo Actis Dato and Giorgio Occhipinti (acclaimed band leaders in their own right), Lauro Rossi and Vincenzo Mazzone (also Italian Instabile Orchestra), and Daniele Patumi (who's in Occhipinti's exciting Hereo Nonetto with Actis Dato, Rossi and Mazzone). Yes, all this commingling makes members of Sud Ensemble eminently sensitive to each other's fertile mood swings, and so makes for a sensational album.

Another member of Giorgio Occhipinti's band is Palermo based saxophonist **Gianni Gebbia**, whose **Body Limits** *(Splasc(h) CDH 462.2 CD)* is his fourth solo recording. While Gebbia's virtuosity is never in question, many of these 17 alto sax improvisations lean too heavily on the now familiar (and perhaps overused) technique of circular breathing; cyclical thematic statements interact with repetitive, often staccato rhythms and shifting drones — the most satisfying being the beautifully controlled rise and fall of 'Rorschach Test'. But Gebbia's real strengths lie in his light, lyrical tone and languorous melodies, best heard on the gorgeous 'straight' pieces, 'White Butoh' and 'Auster'.

Sadly, fewer pleasures are to be found on **Se Una Notte d'Inverno Un Viaggiatore...** *(C.M.C. 9955-2 CD)* by the 7-piece **Arigret**, formed in 1986. Massimo Rossi's compositions rather stiffly allow bursts of free jazz to ruffle their too respectable mix of scat, song, dance and jazz-rock, but the various idioms don't really cohere with any convincing sense of organic development. The concluding 'Il Dottor Zipp', has its dangerous moments, though. *(C.M.C., Corso Filippo Turati 11/C, 1-10128 Torino, Italy)*

**NEW!** **"FEATHERS WITH JAKI" SLAMCD 215.** Howard Riley in duo with Jaki Byard and in trio with Mario Castronari & Tony Marsh. Reissue of Riley's most soughtafter vinyl tracks.

**THE BRITISH SAXOPHONE QUARTET**

**"Early October" SLAMCD 216.** Elton Dean, Paul Dunmall, Simon Picard George Haslam. A live recorded concert of improvised music by 'Four of Europe's top sax avantists', (The Guardian).

**'JON CORBETT/STEVE DONE**

**"Another Fine Mess" SLAMCD 217.** Long awaited debut CD by established trumpet/guitar duo. LJCO soloist meets introvert baroque improviser.

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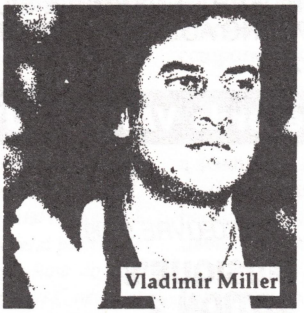
**Moscow Composers Orchestra** *Kings And Cabbages* (Leo Lab CD 005 CD); **Moscow Composers Orchestra with Sainkho Namchylak** *An Italian Love Affair* (Leo Lab CD 019 CD); **Sainkho Namchylak & Ned Rothenberg** *Amulet* (Leo CD LR 231 CD) According to Vladimir Miller, conductor/composer for the **Moscow Composers Orchestra** (MCO), Russia has a strong tradition of big band jazz, both mainstream and experimental. MCO confirm this, boasting a line-up that includes many of the leading figures in post-60s Russian new music. **Kings And Cabbages**, recorded live in 1993, packs a considerable punch. Despite a predominantly jazz instrumentation, Miller's compositions tend to steer clear of obvious idiomatic mannerisms, preferring to challenge the listener with powerful juxtapositions of non-idiomatic densities and intensities, often seamlessly subsiding into more spatial small group and solo activity. Improvisation also plays an important role here — the tumultuous energy of the few feeding off or pitched against the might of the orchestra, as defiant independent voices are inexorably sucked back into the maelstrom.

**An Italian Love Affair**, recorded in 1995, sees some personnel changes; in particular, the introduction of drummer Vladimir Tarasov (of Ganelin Trio fame) and the sax/flute of Vladimir Rezitsky, leader of Jazz Group Arkhangelsk. Also, some downsizing in the bassment area (now 'just' the redoubtable acoustic of Vladimir Volkov) and the conspicuous absence of inventive electric guitarist Alexander Kostikov. The latest line-up swings and marches more, with generally a lighter, breezier approach; the title-track generates some warm fusionesque tone colours not unlike George Russell's Living Time Orchestra. Guest vocalist



Vladimir Miller

**Sainkho Namchylak** (the diva from Tuva) comes to the exotic fore on 'Two Tone Tuva', her jazz scat spilling over into captivating Tuvan traditional and extended techniques; the closing winds improv, including Alexandrov's strange, ethnic influenced bassoon, is especially intriguing. 'March Of The Animals', the most eclectic offering, permits a few parodic waltz and march routines — MCO in Moscow State Circus mode. Yes, they're delightfully light on their feet for a big band. File them in the top flight with LJCO, Globe Unity and Italian Instabile.

**Amulet** is 13 improvisations (1992-95) by **Sainkho** and New York reedsman and shakuhachi player **Ned Rothenberg** — hard to describe in terms of known idioms, but easy to praise for its exceptional sensitivity and strange atmospheric qualities. While I'm still to be convinced that Sainkho has much that's distinctive to offer along the lines of jazz scat, her radical improvising, influenced by Mongolian and other folk traditions, is really something special. Her singing on 'Wee Hours' and 'Lake Song', both based on traditional material, will make your brain tingle and your eyes water with its unfathomable poignancy. Ned Rothenberg is an ideal duo partner, enhancing Sainkho's exotic vocabulary with an understated, elegantly paced brand of his own — his bass clarinet murmurs with the primordial solemnity of a didgeridoo. 'Ancient Garden' and 'Low & Away' are possibly the most exquisite of the many treasures on this remarkable album.

**John Greaves** *Songs* (Resurgence RES 112 CD); **Bill Nelson** *After The Satellite Sings* (Resurgence RES 114 CD) For some hard-to-pin-down reason John Greaves' critical profile has not been as high as most other former members of Henry Cow. Hopefully, **Songs** will rectify this current underrecognition. It's a typically idiosyncratic collection involving several previous collaborators like Robert Wyatt, Peter (as lyricist) and Kristoffer Blegvad, Elton Dean and David Cunningham. Words like quirky and whimsical, though partly accurate, don't fully describe the gentle beauty, sometimes melancholy grace, of Greaves' melodies. Wyatt's delicate multitracked vocals cast a

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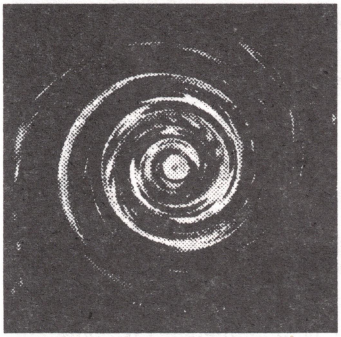

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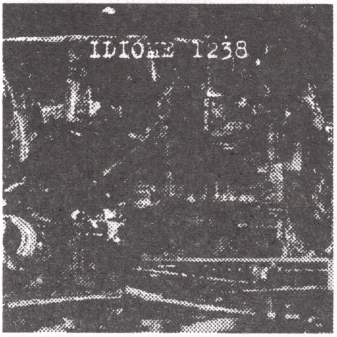


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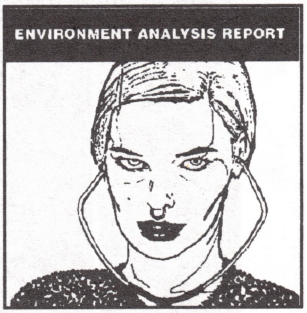
lingering spell over 'The Song' and Peter Blegvad's ingeniously anagrammatic 'Kew. Rhône.'; other vocalists, S'Ange, Caroline Loeb, Kristoffer Blegvad and Greaves, suggest unaffected shades of folk, classical, pop and cabaret; Sophia Domancich, Paul Rogers and Elton Dean supply the restrained but edgy improv. Deceptively simple arrangements that continue to grow in beauty and stature with repeated hearings.

The Resurgence label is also responsible for raising the profile of Bill Nelson's usually neglected solo work with three recent releases: **Crimsworth** (see the review in **Rubberneck 18**), the 4CD-set **My Secret Studio Vol.1** (see my review in *The Wire* #147) and **After The Satellite Sings**, another (virtually) one-man multitrack project. **Satellite** reveals an unexpected interest in new dance musics (jungle, drum 'n' bass); Nelson appropriating their rhythmic energies as the compelling driving force behind densely patterned songs. His moody vocal croon cruises over feverish backbeats, tinged by the hazy glow of layered keyboards and marimba, conjuring shiny, sometimes ironic, visions of 50s America (Kerouac, cars, sci-fi comic books) as dreamed by his boyhood alter ego. The many telling electric guitar breaks (bluesy and jazz-rock, distorted hard rock and tape-manipulated) have a terse, yet biting efficiency; and there's a generous flow of decent tunes. Bill Nelson's intelligent interrogation of pop song structure continues to impress. (*Resurgence, P.O. Box 5, Derwentside, County Durham, DH9 7HR, England*)

**A Contrario** *A Contrario* (Organic OT044 MC) French duo of Yannick Lemesle and Régis Codur (both guitarists, the former also a violinist) operating at the border crossing between improv and avant-rock. Some passages understated and non-rhythmic, others driven by chunky bass riffs or drum machines and turntable inserts, plus some jaunty dance material à la RIO school. Side Two contains best work: 'Tétraèdre' with its forceful, spirited violin and guitar duels; 'Concerto en IF mineur' steers close to new King Crimson. Generally uneven, but worth a listen. (contact: *Régis Codur, 348 Chemin de L'Huide, 83110 Sanary/Mer, France*)

**John Jasnoch** *That Other Worldly Feeling* (edition el c. elc 12007 CD) A 20-minute solo mini-disc from the Sheffield based improv guitarist (once a member of the excellent, now defunct, Sheffield new wave/free jazz group, Bass Tone Trap). John Jasnoch's early interest in bluegrass is still fleetingly apparent in these five improvisations for electric guitar and electronics; likewise, Derek Bailey's intricate, splintered phrasing appears to have left an imprint at some stage. However, armed with these kinds of influences, Jasnoch, now in his early 40s, has still arrived at a distinctive approach to guitarphonics which is both convoluted and cerebral, yet spiced with curious, sprightly melodic shapes such as those on 'Whappin' and 'Flubble'. 'The G.F. Trip', like most pieces, uses electronics to create sudden, jarring pitch fluctuations and angry dissonances. Satisfying work which rewards repeated hearings. (contact: *John Jasnoch, 66 Robey Street, Sheffield, S4 8JF*)




**Manuel M. Mota** *Environment Analysis Report* (Ananana FFF 001 CD) Manuel Mota's debut CD (see **Rubberneck 17**; and profuse apologies to him for misspelling both of his names in my review) served notice that, although still largely unknown, here was a Portuguese guitar improvisor with a distinctive agenda. **Environment Analysis Report** includes urban and natural soundscape pieces (a few too many of these) as well as Mota's more interesting non-idiomatic improvisations for fretless acoustic guitar. With the aid of E-bow, violin bow, picks, bottlenecks and felt sticks, he thoughtfully sculpts a variety of enchanting and disturbing percussive, droning, vibratory microtonal textures. It's time to put Manuel Mota at the top of your list of must-hear improv guitarists. (contact: *Ananana, Apartado 21671, 1137 Lisboa Codex, Portugal*)

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**AMP Records, Box 387, London N22 6SF, United Kingdom.**

**The British Saxophone Quartet** *Early October* (Slam CD216 CD); **Elton Dean & Paul Dunmall** *If Dubois Only Knew* (Voiceprint VP194 CD) Introducing Britain's 'answer' to the USA's World Saxophone Quartet and ROVA Saxophone Quartet — the aptly titled British Saxophone Quartet. Previous line-ups, beginning in 1992, have included Andy Sheppard, Chris Biscoe and Lol Coxhill, but the grouping for this Oxford concert in 1995, the Quartet's debut recording, was Elton Dean (alto and saxello), Paul Dunmall (soprano and tenor), Simon Picard (tenor), and BSQ's spokesman and baritone saxophonist, George Haslam.

Individually these chaps are among the finest exponents of their instruments in Europe; collectively they add up to a sensational quartet. The flow and emotional impact of ideas is compelling, and these are long pieces, too: 23' 42", 27' 34" and 16' 18". There's never a moment when the Quartet is merely treading water, or loitering for inspiration; the melodic and harmonic invention is constantly focused into a group identity that encourages brief solo embellishment without showcasing it as an end in itself. Temperamentally, the players are alike, arguably occupying the more melodic region of the British improv spectrum, though 'Neologie Musicale', in particular, demonstrates the Quartet's ease of expression in both melodic and non-melodic contexts which are successfully interwoven here; this track's sudden, yet seamless, transition from labyrinthine abstraction to a sort of jazz-folk episode (the baritone supplying the dance-like ostinato) is spellbinding. I signally refuse to single out individual contributions, since this is a treasurable group performance. Quite simply, quartet improvising at its finest.

One half of BSQ, Elton Dean and Paul Dunmall, are together again for **If Dubois Only Knew**, their long-awaited debut duo album. Usually regarded as melodists, this is a notably intense session which has more to do with line and tone than thematic statements. While Dunmall is known to freakout on occasion, usually in the company of power-drummer Tony Levin, I can't recall hearing Dean play with the sustained and biting penetration that he achieves here. Not that these are loud improvisations; it's the crisp authority of the execution, the hermetic tightness of the dialogue with its sharply etched lines that hits the listener. 'The Tale Of Two Horns' with its piercing altissimo playing exemplifies the duo's ability to create tension with economy and laser beam precision. Voiceprint's strongest release to date by a long chalk. (*Voiceprint, P.O. Box 5, Derwentside, Co. Durham DH9 7HR, England*)

**Keiji Haino** *The 21st Century Hard-Y-Guide-Y Man* (PSF PSFD-68 CD); **Tamio Shiraishi** *Alto Sax/Live Performances: 1992-1994* (Pataphysique Records DD-004 CD) Japanese improvisation is turning heads in Britain, not least for its rampant eclecticism and extreme attitude to volume and noise, which some listeners find liberating. However, given the terrifying price of Japanese CD-imports, I suspect that this is still an area of improv more talked about than actually listened to. So, when it comes to guitarist Keiji Haino, an underground legend in his own land, I'm an absolute beginner, and **The 21st Century Hard-Y-Guide-Y Man** is an odd place to be initiated — a solo album of hurdy-gurdy improvisations. Track 1 delivers the mayhem implied by the Crimsonesque album title — a kind of chainsaw industrialism. Its screaming mesh of microtones endures for 18 minutes! Exhilarating, but have the paracetamol handy. Track 2 is much much quieter, drifting with a sinister unease and Haino's strange, forlorn vocals; track 3 skilfully builds a *gagaku*-like polyphony of shrill pitches and deep, wavering drones; the long final piece gradually acquires an archaic splendour from its seriously mangled textures. Overused epithets like extraordinary and other-worldly fall short in the face of this album. Keiji Haino creates a wonderful and frightening soundworld, possessed by a vast, desolate beauty, and does so using an instrument which commonly connotes a quaint, bucolic past. You have to hear this CD, whatever it costs.

Alto saxophonist Tamio Shiraishi worked with Keiji Haino in Fushituasha (as synth player) for a couple months in 1979, and then again in 1988. Although part of various punk, rock and experimental groups since the late 70s, recordings

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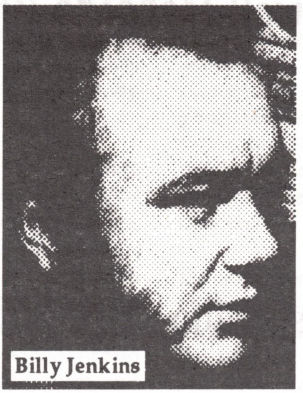
have been rationed to a few appearances on compilations. So **Alto Sax/Live Performances: 1992-1994** is his big break. He's now a resident of New York, but these 14 improvisations were made in Japan, several tracks featuring the dramatic, non-rhythmic drums of Ikurou Takahashi. Shiraishi, who is preoccupied by the alto's altissimo register, seeks out the highest, frailest pitches that teeter on the brink of just breath; his control of tiny, bird-like sounds is exceptional. Yet, this extreme approach becomes repetitive, since he appears to have reached the alto's upper limit. Multitracking and/or circular breathing strategies might reveal other short-term avenues, but it's hard to see where this curious 'self-limiting' approach can lead in the long run. Even so, Tamio Shiraishi's work should be applauded for its singleminded vision. His is an unusual imagination worth discovering. (*P.S.F. is distributed by Harmonia Mundi: 0171 608 2787 / Tamio Shiraishi, 50W 34 Street #17C1, New York, NY 10001, USA*)

**Billy Jenkins/Fun Horns** *East And West Now Wear The Same Vest* (Babel BDV 9601 CD) The second installment of Billy Jenkins' fecund association with The Fun Horns of (East) Berlin is a studio set with more emphasis on ballads than last year's live **Mayfest '94**. Cover versions of 'Close To You' by The Carpenters (here '(Not) Close To You'), 'Wandrin' Star' (I can't get that bastard tune out of my head now!), and 'What A



**Billy Jenkins**

Wonderful World' are delivered with a winsome touch — more affectionate parodic punch than savage pisstake. The robustly anarchic fun is reserved for pieces relating to the East Europe meets West Europe theme. Billy Jenkins' vocals are a delight, never milking the humorous potential of the ballad material, but infusing it with a sort of sad, quirky poignancy reminiscent of Robert Wyatt and Phil Minton. The arrangements and performances by the Voice Of God Collective and The Fun Horns are also deliciously understated, so that when the temperature rises during the improvised parts, you feel the heat instantly. Irresistible. (*Babel, 29A Connaught Street, London W2 2AY*)

**Spontaneous Music Ensemble (Stevens/Coombes/Smith)** *Hot And Cold Heroes (1980-91)* (Emanem 4008 CD); **Spontaneous Music Ensemble (Stevens/Smith/Butcher)** *A New Distance* (ACTA 8 CD) John Stevens, Nigel Coombes and Roger Smith were the longest lasting SME line-up, but were seriously under-recorded. **Hot And Cold Heroes** is the first album entirely devoted to the music of this trio: true to an SME 'philosophy' where individual contributions are offered up for the greater good. Not that distinctive voices don't emerge; the slip-skating phrases of Smith's acoustic guitar, that sometimes swell with flamenco-like flourishes, are interlaced with Coombes' tense and sinuous violin lines. Stevens sharpens the debate using metreless cymbal cascades or dramatically spaced drum snaps and cracks. The nearly half-hour piece 'Boileau Road' proceeds with a detailed determination, recorded in Stevens' dining room! Neil Metcalfe and John Rangecroft add flashes of woodwind colour to 'Five To One', but it's the trio's blended energy that bends the ear most memorably.

After Coombes left in 1992, John Butcher (tenor/soprano saxes) joined. **A New Distance** is the first recording to surface by this Stevens/Smith/Butcher line-up and, sadly, with the passing of John Stevens in September 1994, these two London sets (3rd LMC Festival and the Red Rose Club) are also the last they recorded. Consequently, the album now represents the end of an era; the triumphant final chapter in the SME story — a story that lasted almost 30 years. Butcher's marvellous sensitivity to microtonal timbral detail is ideally suited to SME's egoless ethos; the trio's close-knit cohesion is exemplified on 'Stig' — a breathtaking masterwork of subtle, non-idiomatic invention

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which maintains its intricate, textural focus for 26 minutes. Inspirational. (*Emanem, c/o Martin Davidson, 3 Bittacy Rise, Mill Hill, London NW7 2HH / ACTA Records, 28 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LQ*)

Alquimia

**Alquimia** *Wings Of Perception* (AMP CD028 CD) Mexican vocalist and composer Alquimia came to the attention of British listeners in the early 90s when settling in London she began to work with improvisors from the London Musicians' Collective. Her debut, **Coatlicue: Goddess Of The Earth** (1992), was a suite of electroacoustic compositions inspired by ancient Mexican legends. Although initially inspired by the writings of Carlos Castaneda, **Wings Of Perception** is certainly less overtly programmatic, and without **Coatlicue's** pomp-prog rock tendencies. There's also a closer attention to timbral detail; while swirling with vaporous synths, chiming guitars and ethnic percussives, the soundscape is infiltrated by finer gradations of non-thematic and non-rhythmic sounds that signal an abstract improv inclination (LMC guests include Dave Draper and Ivor Kallin). These ambivalent textures bring a keener edge to the unashamedly sensual elements of her soundworld, and keep pastel themes from sounding merely pretty. Yes, Alquimia demonstrates that sensuality and prettiness can have an interesting part to play in this experimental environment. Although her vision remains essentially idiosyncratic, her music is possibly accessible enough to tempt the wider world of ambient, world music, even new age listeners. An eclectic triumph. Check it out on headphones. (*AMP Records, Box 387, London N22 6SF*)

**Grew Trio** *Grew Trio* (Stonewell CD1 CD) Introducing Stonewell Records, a new label concerned to promote improvisors from the north of England; in this case, the debut recording by the approachable Lancaster / Manchester free jazz trio of relative newcomer Stephen Grew, plus undersung stalwarts Richard Scott and Phillip Marks. Scott is the group's expressive powerhouse; it's the linear thrust of his soprano sax, rapier-like in the upper register, that gives the music its sense of urgency, and elegance, when the mood lightens. While traces of Steve Lacy and Evan Parker remain (inevitable, perhaps, considering the overwhelming influence of these two giants of the modern soprano), his playing is always possessed by an attractive emotional directness. Grew's piano supports with colourful stoccato chords reminiscent of Mal Waldron, though on the final piece he emerges as a more robust percussive force. Phillip Marks' drumming is harder to pin down, his self-effacing contributions seem to hover at the periphery, creating subtle space, depth and uncertainty with an angular purpose that resists a firm, rhythmic imprint. (*Stonewell Records, P.O. Box 52, Lancaster LA2 6GB, England*)

**Hugh Davies/Hans-Karsten Raecke** *Klangbilder* (*Sound Pictures*) (Klangwerkstatt edition SM 500 135 D CD) This is not the easiest of albums to attune to. There's a quality to the playing which understates the usual conversational interplay of the improvising duo — as much concern here for the sounds themselves as for the way they are shaped into a musical dialogue. Hugh Davies coaxes fascinating microtones from his invented instruments (Shozygs, My Spring Collection, etc) with the delicate brushstrokes of a miniaturist — tiny, insectile sounds amplified into limpid droplets. The Mannheim based instrument inventor, Hans-Karsten Raecke, is a sensitive collaborator whose wind and string creations operate on a larger scale; his Bambus-Schalmei has the braying power of a baritone sax. The excellent 'Klangbild 5' even conjures a period of unexpected lyrical tonality before its beautifully controlled, fading exit. These are experienced soundsmiths who clearly relish the way unusual timbres resonate and decay. Their patient improvising

will draw you in, but it may take a few hearings. (contact: *Hugh Davies, 25 Albert Road, London N4 3RR /Hans-Karsten Raecke, Schwanenstrasse 31, 68259 Mannheim, Germany*)

**Peter Hammill** *X My Heart* (Fie! FIE 9111 CD) "In my dream world," says Peter Hammill, "these are what might almost pass for pop songs." And if these nine songs were *really* pop songs, they'd be overlong and overwrought. Mind you, **X My Heart** contains some stirring melodies that even popsters could whistle, like the opening *a cappella* version of 'A Better Time' where PH's multi-tracked vocals are tastefully arranged in a motet meets traditional Irish setting — his polyphony is poignant. A second version concludes the album in a chamber-Irish vein. Between, there are more Celtic references on 'Amnesiac': Stuart Gordon's violin and David Jackson's flute/sax running the gamut from gentle folk to turbo-charged rock with customary flair. 'A Forest Of Pronouns' features some fine polyrhythmic percussion from Manny Elias in the album's most complex arrangement. In fact, Hammill's arrangements using real-time playing with computer sequencing are superbly crafted throughout, and repay close inspection. However, the lyrics (including familiar themes of Memory and Identity) are at times too general or abstract to make much impact. Time, perhaps, for him to revisit the kind of socio-political subjects (where targets have names) that invigorated past glories like **The Future Now** and **pH7**. (*Fie! Records, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath BA1 5UG, England*)

**Miriodor** *Jongleries Élastiques* (*Elastic Juggling*) (Cuneiform Rune 78 CD) This Canadian group started out in the early 80s; *Jongleries Élastiques*, their fourth album, features a quartet assisted by guests playing brass, woodwind, strings, plus the odd vocal. Canterbury eggheads should enjoy the complex arrangements, reminiscent of National Health; their guitarist, Bernard Falaise, has a tone not unlike Phil Miller's, and the organ sounds recall Dave Stewart. The album's theme is the circus, interpreted with a playful use of dance material, underpinned by some very tricky rhythmic manoeuvres. Musicianship is superb; likewise the balance between structural complexity and melodic charm. It'll almost break your heart to hear how they cut short the lovely accordion theme on 'The Little Ship's Terrible Wreck'. Even with obvious progressive/RIO influences, Miriodor have sufficient wit and craft of their own to create a music that's distinctive, challenging and highly entertaining.

**Idiome 1238** *Idiome 1238*(33REVPERMI 9506 CD) The Nancy improv scene is the most vibrant in France, yet still relatively unknown here in Britain. Idiome 1238 are something of an all-star Nancy line-up that includes members of Soixante Etages, Etage 34, and the Open Paper Tree trio who performed at the May 1996 LMC Festival in London — a rare appearance over here by musicians from this scene.

**Idiome 1238** consists of a single 59-minute improvisation: an enormous work that invites comparisons with illustrious antecedents like John Coltrane's **Ascension** and Peter Brötzmann Octet's **Machine Gun**. Another 8-piece, Idiome 1238 comprise Fabrice Charles (trombone), Jacques Debout (turntables, tapes), Michel Doneda (soprano saxophone), Daniel Koskowitz (drums), Lê Quan Ninh (percussion), Jean Pallandre (synths, etc), Olivier Paquotte (electric bass) and Dominique Repecaud (electric guitar). They produce a formidable non-idiomatic sound that reveals a marvellous mutual understanding, clearly based on all those aforementioned collaborations, and others. The piece has a breathtaking sweep with periods of incredibly dense multilayered activity that spans the entire spectrum from the deepest throbbing bass drones to the highest soprano split tones. Never simply the grand gesture; always, in the larger picture one perceives the vivid details, like the interaction between related instruments; the drums/percussion gamelan, the metallic textures of bass/guitar, the colorific swirls and waves of turntables/synths, and the almost vocalic sensitivity of trombone/soprano. It proceeds unpredictably, avoiding the obvious louds 'n' lulls trajectory of some large-scale improv, and ends delightfully. Awesome. (*33REVPERMI, BP 3042, F54012 Nancy Cedex, France*) **R**

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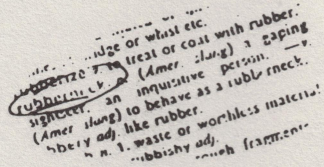


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